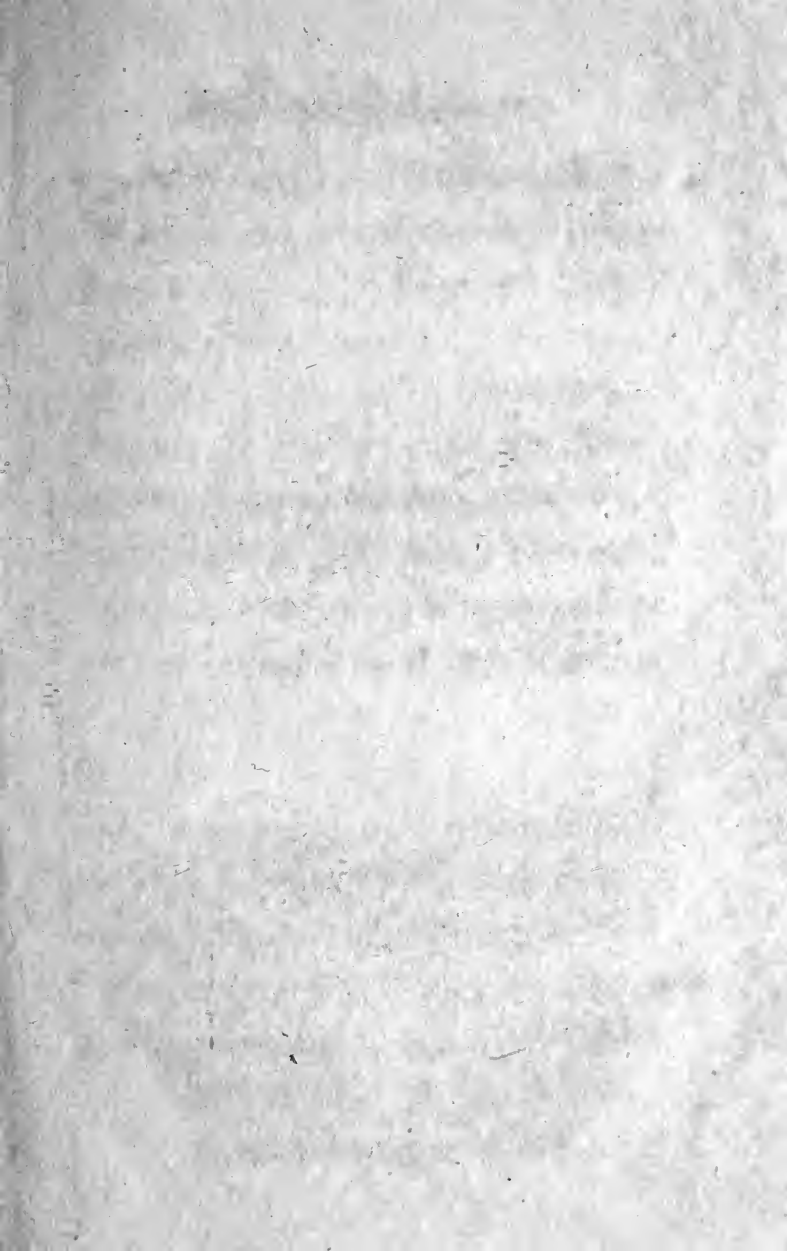




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REYNOLDS AND HIS FRIENDS

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SEYMOUR AND HIS FRIENDS.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“THE SECRET MARRIAGE.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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SEYMOUR AND HIS FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

Cross Purposes.

The following morning was, in Mabel's opinion, to do wonders. Florence would have ample time to devote to her, and make amends for her first reception, and surely Mr Dalrymple would turn penitent, or, at least, give some reason for his conduct, and then they would be certain to be good friends again, for there was so much to admire which suited their mutual

taste—they had so much to discuss, Mabel had so many little confidences to make! She felt happy and in good spirits after a good night's rest, and quite ready to take the very brightest possible view of things. So was Mr Beverley, as he greeted Mabel on her first entrance into the breakfast-room, and so was the good-natured Lord Carlsfort, as he invited her to make the tour of the statue and picture-gallery, relying upon Beverley's superior knowledge, to lead him and his companion out of the mazes of the heathen mythology into the bright artistic light of the middle ages.

For the pleasure of exchanging a few kind words with Mr Dalrymple, Mabel would willingly have postponed this tour of inspection, which promised so many attractions. Once she even raised her eyes to his as he sat opposite

to her, in an unwarrantably gloomy reverie, considering that the business and toils of the day had scarcely been entered upon. She was on the point of asking him to join the party, but at the moment Lady Florence entered, radiant in beauty, and instantly began to open upon him a battery of bright smiles and winning words, so that Mabel again retreated within herself, and began to call seriously to her assistance all the unamiable feelings of which she was mistress. Lady Florence begged to be excused the oft-repeated examination of Venuses and Apollos, of Raphaels and Rubenses, but Lady Emily Farquaharson's taste for the antique and beautiful had not been so often gratified, and she was highly pleased at being invited to accompany Mabel, who, in her real admiration for art, forgot for the moment

the disappointment she was suffering. Beverley was quite in his element, while Lord Carlsfort listened with due deference to his explanations on what was to him veiled in mystery, feeling, while he participated in Mabel's pleasure, that he had never been so little bored in the presence of painted canvas and white marble.

In the mean time Dalrymple, with the inconsistency which those well versed in human nature can probably account for, amused himself with drawing forth all Lady Florence's powers of conversation, apparently forgetful of all, but of her beauty and attractions, inwardly longing to demand an explanation with regard to Mabel's turquoise bracelet, and to open her eyes, with the friendship he had professed for her, to Beverley's character. But pride forbade him to run the risk of appearing

actuated by mean jealousy, and thus a coolness was established between them, which neither knew the difficulty of overcoming. During the two or three following days no opportunity seemed to offer for any explanation, though the time passed in a gay routine of riding parties, dinners, drives, and dances, which by a kind of unseen manœuvring were especially got up for Mabel's pleasure, by the attentive Lord Carlsfoot, who was gradually becoming so devoted to her, that even Beverley with peculiar tact relinquished by degrees the pleasing privileges to which prior acquaintance had entitled him.

And yet Mabel was far from happy. But who has looked forward with intense pleasure to anything, and not been disappointed, though out of the ashes of such disappointment some species of compen-

sation has arisen ? If Dalrymple's manner had not piqued and annoyed Mabel, she would have been much more sadly occupied in dwelling upon Florence's behaviour ; but, as it was, he certainly had his share in her thoughts. She was angry with herself, when she reflected how much she had been influenced by his opinion, and how really anxious she was to please him ; yet she was determined that any advance towards a reconciliation should be made by him ; and that the footing on which their future intercourse was to be, should be entirely of his choosing. In the mean time, she was always ready to enter into any scheme of amusement proposed by Lord Carlsfort, and, for the first time in her life, endeavoured to hide deeper feelings by a gay, thoughtless, and, as Mr Dalrymple fancied, heartless manner. And she succeeded in gaining, at his hands,

as much credit for worldliness and frivolity, as in reality belonged to either of the Ladies Trevelyan. All his old distrust of womankind returned, since Mabel had first entered into the society of Meverley, and with so much more force that he had almost unwittingly begun, in his seclusion at Hazelymph, to dwell in fancy upon her superiority, not reflecting that he had at the first onset put her woman's pride to the test, by the suspicious coldness he had shown her. His natural reserve caused his sensitiveness to recoil upon himself. Why should he have expected perfection, or even a well-balanced character, in any woman, much less in one so young as Mabel Neville?

This estrangement had lasted some days, and Mabel was making up her mind to break through the uncomfortable formality, for the sake of ascertaining the truth with regard to

Sir Charles Seymour's prospects, when one morning, passing through the picture-gallery that she might at her leisure study its beauties, she suddenly found herself standing face to face with Mr Dalrymple. He was alone—and now that an opportunity for the *tete-à-tete* she had secretly wished for presented itself, her first impulse was to retreat. But that was impossible! With a slight hesitation in manner, and with a very heightened colour, for a confusion of ideas rushed into her mind, she first broke the silence with some very unapt remark on the picture she was examining. However, she was now determined not to lose ground, or give him any advantage over her, and soon, as if Dalrymple were but a common acquaintance whom chance had initiated into her family concerns, she put several straightforward questions relative to his knowledge of

Seymour's history, thanking him politely, but coldly, for his interest in Eleanor's welfare.

All this was not pleasing to Dalrymple, and in the same somewhat haughty manner in which she addressed him, he replied to her questions, carefully concealing the more than friendly part he had acted towards Seymour. Now was the time for the unveiling of Beverley's character, had anything like the former good feeling existed between him and Mabel, but where neither was disposed to make the smallest concession outwardly, no approach to the familiarity of friendship was possible, and the short interview passed over, leaving rather an increase than a diminution of estrangement between them.

From that moment Mabel, with wonderful perseverance, began to glide down the stream of coquetry, now with Lord Carlsfort, now with

Mr Beverley; in a perfectly heartless manner, certainly, for she was totally untouched by Lord Carlsfort's evident admiration, and was quite content with the knowledge that her power over Beverley was of very short-lived duration. But, instead of producing the effect she inwardly hoped for, Mabel succeeded, against her expectations, in giving Dalrymple a perfectly erroneous idea of her character—while his admiration of beauty drew him insensibly towards Lady Florence, in whose society he was continually thrown.

CHAPTER II.

“Acquirement of information, benignity, something to do, and as many things as possible to love, these are the secrets of happiness in town or country.”

THE charms of a country house, great and varied as they are, should only be at the service of those who can appreciate them.

It was the source of the greatest vexation to the Countess and her two eldest daughters, that they were obliged to sacrifice themselves, for a few months every year, in doing duty at Molverley. What affinity could there be between themselves, and the hills, and green trees, and the old border castles of Cumber-

land? All might be very beautiful, and very picturesque, suited to the taste of artists and poets, but "if a few of Carlsfort's friends were not fond of the occupations of fishing and shooting, the time would really have hung too heavy upon their hands!" Surely, they argued, human beings were made for society, and if a certain portion of 'ennui' must be got through in life, let it exhaust itself amidst courts and etiquette, in ball and concert-rooms, amongst the hum of fellow-creatures, rather than in the solitudes of inanimate nature.

Thus felt and thought the votaries of fashion, if they did not openly express their opinions. In the gay world there was, at least, some excitement in supporting a hardly-earned 'renommée,' even in making plans for the morrow, in ordering a new dress, or in listening to the latest piece of fashionable news; but the

neighbours round Melverley were good, awkward, homely people, who did not know right from wrong as regarded fashion, and who, of course, looked up to the inhabitants of the Castle as semi-divinities, who were so surrounded by the halo of superior advantages, as to be all but unapproachable!

Lady Merivale certainly endeavoured to do her duty, but her efforts were felt to proceed entirely from the motive 'duty,' and therefore the Squires, and the Squires' ladies, and the specimens of various degrees of gentility who came within the Castle's invitations, were neither happy, nor did they consider themselves honoured, by its invitations. How stiff and wrinkled the Countess was become! how proud and over-bearing was Lady Matilda! how vain, and conceited, was Lady Honoria!

Such were amongst the remarks made, not very good-naturedly, by many who considered themselves as much injured as gratified by their annual invitations to Molverley Castle. Yet the world, though prone to be ill-natured, is very discriminating, and is apt to set a very true value upon motives and actions.

It was about a week after Mabel's arrival at Molverley. Some of the guests had departed, others had taken their places. Mabel was becoming a universal favourite, particularly with the old Earl, who was gradually sinking into the state of an invalid, and who was learning daily to appreciate more and more the kindness, with which she listened for a certain time every day to the account of his various ailments, walked by the side of his arm-chair when his daughters were too busy or too

indolent to attend him, and read or sang to him, as he dozed many an hour away of the evening twilight.

At such times Dalrymple's eye would brighten, and he would be on the point of addressing Mabel once more in the friendly accents of former days, when Florence would suddenly draw away his attention to herself, or Lord Carlsfort put forth his claims on her good nature, or Mabel herself would make, partly in mischief, and partly unintentionally, some little remark which wounded his present susceptible state of feeling, and then he would bury himself again apparently in his book or his newspaper, secretly wondering what influence it could be which this young girl exercised so powerfully over him.

But what would life be without its certain envelope of mystery? How few would care

to climb the steep ascent did not its very steepness invigorate their endeavours.

Not that Dalrymple and Mabel were playing a game which was entirely suited to their respective tastes. The little cloud which had at first arisen in the horizon had now painfully obscured it, while Mabel was, at the same time, learning another lesson which only experience can teach. She was learning day by day that friendship is not a plant of easy cultivation, that the thorns and briars of pride and circumstance often check its growth, and that those who are capable of true and lasting friendship possess a depth of character which does not always belong to a disposition quick and susceptible to other influences. Mabel soon learnt to look upon Lady Matilda and Lady Honoria as common-place characters, in whom it was impossible to take an interest,—but she

had felt bound to Florence by ties which it indeed grieved her to think were loosening, were gradually dissolving. When they were alone, Florence's conversation was of herself, of the admiration she had excited, of the reception she had met with at the Drawing-room, at which, being late, her Majesty had been graciously pleased to return and allow her a private presentation, thus paying high homage to the fame of her beauty. All seemed to be overlooked, or to sink into nothing, in comparison with her hopes, her wishes, her plans. Mabel had been asked to Molverley as her companion, and the idea of her entering into any competition with her was not to be entertained for a moment. And Mabel unwittingly encouraged the very selfishness from which she shrank, while she kindly listened to, and entered into, and sympathized

with Florence in all her little confidences, scarcely ever asking in return for a patient hearing of the thoughts, which at times pressed heavily upon her, connected with Eleanor's unhappy prospects. But pure and unselfish friendship, such as Mabel's, requires the nourishment of sympathy, and often she grieved over the knowledge she had gained that a character such as Florence's was unsuited to her's. Often, too, she longed to give vent to feelings, to know that some kind one was at hand who would enter into them, who would with her love and admire all that was beautiful, who would understand the native poetry that existed all undefined in her heart, and to which, she felt she could now scarcely give utterance even to Florence, much less to the cold, worldly-minded beings who, for the most part, surrounded her at Molverley. So much

to her was beautiful, and would have been enjoyable, she wondered how life was allowed to pass in a round of such trivial amusements, unmeaning and useless occupations, and unnatural etiquette. Yet there was a kind of fascination in this existence, of which she could scarcely give account. Every one did, or, at least, was privileged to do, exactly what was most agreeable. All was luxury, ease, and liberty, except when the forms of society imposed restraint, and Mabel walked, rode, sketched, sung, wandered in the sunlight and moonlight, to her heart's content, raising up castles in the air, as all girls of her age are apt to do, and as soon as one fell to the ground, materials were always at hand to construct another and another. And over many of these castles certainly hovered the indistinct form of Herbert Dalrymple,—but

why, if he were kind, unselfish, clear-sighted, generous, and sympathizing, why was he so changed to her? And still the question remained unanswered, while many a party of pleasure was formed in which she now declined to take a part, for her heart was, in truth, so ill at ease in Dalrymple's society, that the sacrifice was not so great as it would have been in the early part of the visit.

On one point she felt assured—it was of Florence's growing partiality for Dalrymple. Was it returned? There could be but little doubt of it—Dalrymple had long outstayed the usual limits of a friendly visit. As she had foreseen, he must be fascinated with the beauty of Lady Florence. They were becoming daily more intimate, and while her heart whispered that in her place she would have been in attendance on her father, Florence,

following the bent of her inclination, was the first to propose a riding or driving party, of which it seemed absolutely necessary that Mr Dalrymple should take the direction, and Mabel was beginning to accustom herself to the idea that her inferiority to her friend, in every point of view, was the real secret of his indifference to herself.

More than a fortnight had passed since Mabel's arrival at Meverley, as she came down one morning to breakfast with the firm determination of enjoying the present moment, and casting away all anxiety, past, present, or future. Everything looked so bright and clear in the frosty sunshine, as her eye wandered over the groups of deer, reposing amidst fern under the clumps of beech, oak, and elm, to the hills, and the blue sky above, that she felt for the moment that pain and

sorrow were not made to be the portion of those favoured beings for whom this fair scene was intended, and that while everything around spoke of enjoyment, ennui, at least, should be banished from every heart.

But not so appeared to think the Lady Matilda Trevelyan, as she soon afterwards sauntered into the blue drawing-room, which opened into the library, where, according to custom, the gentlemen were mostly buried in their newspapers, and which was seldom trod by female steps.

“What shall we do to day, Matilda?” said Lady Honoria, who was watching, from the window, the blue smoke rising in the direction of the little country town in which Captain Sparkes had first seen the light, and which had a certain interest in her eyes.

“A perfectly useless question, Honoria ; what

can we do to-day, but the same thing we did yesterday, and probably shall do this day next year? What variety of occupation can there be in this dreadful Cumberland desert?"

Mabel laughed. "I feel as if anything and everything would be charming—quite delightful to-day. In doors or out of doors, I love the sunshine, and the frost, even; and in beautiful Meverley there is something new to admire if you look upon the same scene every day, I think."

"Thanks, Miss Neville, thanks—and any amount of approbation you think fit to appropriate!" exclaimed Lord Carlsfort, who, followed by Dalrymple, had just opened the library door, and was watching the half-busy, half-idle appearance presented by the blue drawing-room. "I see *you* are able to appreciate even the horrors of a wintry banishment to Meverley;

or, rather, I should say, its delights. I do not think I have ever convicted *you* of having been sentenced to the hard labour I see some fair young ladies are undergoing at this present moment. Honoria, why are you cutting holes in that piece of muslin?—and you, Lady Emily, is it perfectly necessary you should torment that unfortunate rose-bud on this glorious winter's day?"

"Now, what would you have us do?" replied Lady Emily, blushing with pleasure at even this slight impromptu notice of Lord Carlsfort's. "I will put away my embroidery, or any thing else you like, if—"

"Thank you, thank you," he replied, carelessly, turning to the Miss Langtons, who hid their pretty blushing cheeks behind a large roll of "cross-stitch," while Lady Oldborough was observed to wake up quietly from a short

doze. "I am very impertinent, but I really hope you will pardon me, in consideration of my full conviction that you are all capable of better things."

"I think I can speak in Miss Neville's favour, if she will allow me," said Dalrymple, laying a peculiar stress upon the last words. "I do not think either indolence or idleness can be numbered amongst her defects."

"This frosty morning has put you all in good humour with me," replied Mabel, while a certain feeling of pleasure mingled with the surprise she endeavoured not to show; "but, Lord Carlsfort, you should tell us what are the better things about which you express yourself so hopefully—are we to turn huntresses, ballet-dancers, or philosophers?—Mr Dalrymple, I know, will vouch for my proficiency." She

said this playfully—it might be with the intention of hiding any deeper feeling, for she did not trust herself to raise her eyes to Mr Dalrymple, who had, she fancied, bestowed upon her the few kind spare words Florence's absence left at his disposal.

“If you set a good example, others will follow it,” he replied, in low tones, but loud enough to catch the ear of Lady Matilda, who said, drily,

“Mr Dalrymple is quite right—we are all ready to follow any good example Miss Neville will be so kind as to set us.”

“Pray only think of Miss Neville as of one anxious to learn a thousand, thousand things, and to take advantage of every ray of good fortune and kindness with ready gratitude,” exclaimed Mabel. And now she felt Mr

Dalrymple's eyes were fixed upon her; she had an intuitive idea that they expressed partly pleasure and partly reproach.

And she was not far wrong; but while a thousand thoughts were flying through her mind Lord Carlsford dispelled a pleasing illusion by saying, "You must teach my sisters, when in Cumberland, to be a little more countrified. Sitting in the midst of these our ancestral halls," he continued, with much dignity, "and looking out upon those splendid baronial possessions, which came into our hands (I have heard) at the Conquest, it is surprising that they are always sighing after the parvenuism of Belgravia—where their next-door neighbour is, I know, a retired cotton spinner."

"You are not worthy of your family descent," said Matilda; "riches can buy every thing

except high birth—that we keep to ourselves, do we not, Lady Emily?”

“Are you not a scion of our ancient nobility? hidden, perhaps, disguised, lost, until it peeps out again beneath this coronet of ivy leaves;” and Lord Carlsfort ventured so far to transgress the rules of etiquette as to place upon Mabel’s brow a wreath of ground ivy, which she had herself gathered, with the sinister intention, unknown to the admiring Viscount, of copying it in embroidery.

“Really, a coronet becomes you admirably.”

“Very likely,” said Mabel, quietly, as she removed the wreath, and without the slightest coquetry giving Lord Carlsfort one of her brightest smiles.

Lord Carlsfort was charmed. Dalrymple turned away—Lady Florence entering at the moment, he immediately engaged her in close

conversation; but Lady Matilda, kindly solicitous on Mabel's account, continued—

“It is not fair of you, Carlsfort, to spoil Miss Neville, or Florence will have a heavy sin to answer for, in having introduced her to Molverley. Certainly we shall be most grateful if she will kindly tell us her secret of influencing.”

“Her secret is, that she is always happy, and in the best of humours,” her brother interrupted, quickly; “and no one is going to spoil her; though I will tell her, and every one, that she would look uncommonly handsome in a coronet of diamonds, if that simple ivy-wreath becomes her so well.”

“I am really so much obliged to you, Lord Carlsfort, for your good opinion,” said Mabel, simply, anxious to put a stop to a conversation which, while it brought her too prominently

forward, not only gave cause of displeasure to Lady Matilda, but had had the effect of dismissing Dalrymple. "You must not, however, undertake my defence too warmly, or that will imply that you think there is a necessity for doing so."

"If you require more champions than one, my friend Dalrymple will stand up for you as well—will you not, Dalrymple?" said Lord Carlsfort, who this morning, through his growing partiality for Mabel, and his blunt good nature, seemed bent upon placing his favourite in an uncomfortable position.

"Mabel will be fortunate if Mr Dalrymple undertakes her defence," said Florence; "one does not always find a friend in need."

"You mean, also, that one does not always know one's true friends," replied Dalrymple, carelessly.

"I beg your pardon—a friend is always supposed privileged to tell you the most disagreeable truths, only for your good," said Lady Florence.

"And," continued Mabel, "to perform the kindest actions, without asking for thanks."

"A delightful conclusion—I confess I prefer your part of the definition to Lady Florence's, Miss Neville," added Dalrymple, with an approving smile.

"But mine is no less true than Mabel's. It is natural, Mr Dalrymple, you should approve of your pupil's ideas, for I fancy you have had some share in her education."

"A very slight share," said Mabel, blushing ;
"at all events, I think Mr Dalrymple has long ago given up his pupil as incorrigible. I am sure he has an idea that I am very rebellious, and ——"

“If we always gave up a project when we found a difficulty in executing it, we should not spend a very profitable life,” he replied, seriously; “where there is the slightest room for hope, where any improvement may be expected, any impression made—”

“Mr Dalrymple always endeavours to keep the game in his own hands,” said Mabel, quickly; “putting before you difficulties, just not amounting to impossibilities; and if you fail, he shows you no mercy or pity.”

“Am I so very exacting? If so, you must pardon me. Where it pleases me to look for perfection, it grieves me to be disappointed.”

He said this so kindly, Mabel's heart felt softened. In these few words, more was implied than most would have understood. To Florence they sounded like merely common

words of gallantry such as she was accustomed to listen to, for she had long ago decided that Mabel could be no rival to her, where she wished to be preferred, and merely thinking that the conversation was beginning to take a very uninteresting turn, she called upon her brother to propose some scheme for the morning's amusement.

“With all my heart—the very thing I was thinking of when you had finished your discussion, which I suppose ends by leaving you very much as it found you. But we old fellows, Dalrymple, should be obliged, when beautiful young ladies waste even so much as a word, much less a thought upon us.”

“Certainly; but life is a series of obligations, in one way or another,” replied Dalrymple.

“How I wish I were a magician, that I might know what each and all of these fair

dames are thinking of,—that I might if possible suit their respective tastes,” continued the good-natured Lord Carlsfort. “Now if we only lived in the Palace of Truth, the world would go much more smoothly ; there would be no misunderstandings, no dilemmas.”

“And there would be no scope for an adventurous spirit,—all would be flat, and commonplace,” replied Mabel ; “you would not advocate that state of existence ?”

“Yes, for a time it would be quite refreshing. Now I am certain that you are all doing violence to your inclinations—mother, sisters, Lady Emily ! all, except, perhaps, Lady Oldborough,” he continued, laughing, as he perceived the quiescent state into which that lady had again fallen. “But I will spare you a general confession, if Miss Neville, as the youngest, I believe, of the party, and therefore the least

tinctured with conventionalism, will candidly say whether she would prefer on this bright winter's morning, an expedition to one of our old border castles, to spending the day in this abode of luxury, and tapestry?"

This question was simultaneously answered in the affirmative by the younger members of the assembled party.

"Then, speak candidly a second time; now a great deal of candour is required—for my question is not at all according to rule. Will each lady describe the order of march she would prefer."

"Carlsfort—Carlsfort, pray do things in their usual order," exclaimed the Countess, who thought it high time to interfere, dreading the effect of her son's good-nature and contempt for form. "Of course you will order the barouche and cabriolet."

“The sight even will be fatal to enjoyment, my lady mother; a barouche and four wending its way to Featherstone Castle.—No, no, let every one be happy to-day—*étiquette* will mismanage the whole affair. We will make a riding party, at least; Lady Emily what say you?”

Lady Emily never rode, unfortunately—nor did the Miss Langtons, nor Lady Matilda, nor Lady Honoria.

“Then you must be condemned to the barouche and four. Who will you choose as your cavaliers, fair ladies; and you, Miss Neville, I lay myself at your feet. Who shall be your escort? for you, I am convinced, are a good horse-woman.”

“There, now, who shall we choose as our escort, Mabel,” said Florence, laughing, as Lord Carlsfort, Beverley, and Dalrymple ranged them-

selves before the two friends, waiting for their decision—Lord Carlsfort looking so good-humoured, and thoroughly enjoying the little scene, which brought such a brilliant colour into Mabel's cheeks; Beverley, as if nothing could go, or ever had gone wrong with him; Dalrymple, as if placed in an uncomfortable position, from which he was nevertheless determined to extricate himself with perfect self-possession.

“Can we not all ride?” exclaimed Mabel.

“Impossible; there are but four riding-horses; one of your humble petitioners must fall to the share of the barouche party.”

“Then I select Lord Carlsfoot, as in duty bound.”

“Not in duty! say some more agreeable word; but no, we are in the Palace of Truth.”

“ We will compromise,—duty and pleasure sometimes agree,” replied Mabel, laughing.

“ I cannot stand a tacit refusal, and therefore yield the position of honour to Mr Dalrymple,” said Beverley, with mock solemnity. “ Lady Emily, Lady Matilda, I shall have the honour of accompanying you.”

Lady Emily had set her heart upon different things, but Lord Carlsford was, or pretended to be, happily ignorant of her wishes, and mounting his own beautiful bay, was soon riding by the side of Miss Neville, who, with Lady Florence and Mr Dalrymple, composed the riding party. Mabel thought it all very pleasant, and, according to her own confession, felt in duty bound to listen to Lord Carlsford’s jokes, and good-natured but not very interesting conversation, during the greater part of the ride. Every now and

then she found her thoughts wandering to Florence and her companion, who she was well pleased should become intimate, though she could not help regretting past days, and similar tête-à-têtes. Florence, in the mean time, was learning to appreciate all that was charming in Mr Dalrymple's peculiar talent for conversation; wondered how it had happened that Mabel had so seldom spoken to her of her neighbour at Hazelymph, and how it was that she had been and was so blind to his superiority over the flattering and uninteresting world in general. She felt it would really be worth while to deserve Mr Dalrymple's praise, and her vanity whispered that it would be glorious to add his name to that of the many devotees she already possessed. Probably he did not read these thoughts, or he might have uttered a few

words, which would have changed their course. He wished to have an insight into her character, more through a reflected than through a real interest in her.

During the ride their conversation touched upon London society, a theme on which Lady Florence loved more to expatiate than did Mr Dalrymple.

"I had often heard your name mentioned before the season began, Lady Florence. You may imagine I was anxious to see the reality."

"Indeed!" said Florence, delighted, for her vanity was gratified. "Perhaps it was at Lord Sinclair's, or at the Marchioness of Torrington's. I was at several of their balls last season."

"No. I have lost sight, as I think I told you, of most of my former friends in the great world," he replied drily: "the world in which you move, Lady Florence. No ;

my curiosity was simply excited by the admiration with which I have always heard you spoken of by a near neighbour of mine—Miss Neville.”

“What! only Mabel! ah! poor Mabel. She lives so retired—so completely out of the world at her own home. I asked her here, thinking a little change would be pleasant for her; but, as my mother says, one does not know whether such a change is very desirable, or not.”

“I should say a most pleasant one, if I may be allowed an opinion. But why the epithet, ‘poor Mabel,’ Lady Florence?”

“Oh! can you not understand! surely your penetration cannot be at fault. It is too long a story—of course every position in life *may* have its advantages, but——”

“Indeed I do not understand,” persisted

Dalrymple ; “ will you kindly enlighten my ignorance ? ” He looked so serious, Florence felt some explanation was necessary—yet she hardly knew how to begin.

“ It is impossible not to see things sometimes as they really are,” she said, hesitatingly. “ When one is very young, one cannot be supposed capable of judging.”

“ I think you judged very wisely, in selecting Miss Neville as your friend.”

“ Do you, indeed ! ” she replied, in a somewhat mortified tone ; “ perhaps so. I was always fond of Mabel, I do appreciate her character—I know how kind and unselfish she is ; but still ! you, Mr Dalrymple, a man of the world, do you not see the inconvenience, I must call it, of moving in such different spheres ? You see, you oblige me to speak openly.”

“I want to understand your meaning exactly. Perhaps I have no right to comment upon an explanation so unwillingly given, or I should say that it was coldly spoken, of one you might be proud of calling your friend, for such she is, absent and present.”

A right cord was touched for a moment—Florence’s heart smote her; she had not acted the part in which, in her place, Mabel would have shown herself so true and generous. She rather shrunk from the reproach Dalrymple’s words implied.

“I only wish we were really suited,” she replied. “I only wish we really moved in the same society. I have been so often told that I was doing Miss Neville an injury, in bringing her out of her own element——”

“That you have at last brought yourself to believe it true,” he replied, with a smile.

“I do not think you are speaking your own real sentiments, Lady Florence!”

The latter looked surprised; but there was something in Mr Dalrymple’s manner and countenance, which not only said he was in earnest, but that he felt himself privileged to put into her mind a chain of ideas to which she had hitherto been a stranger.

“I am afraid that you think very meanly of me; I am afraid I cannot explain myself satisfactorily, if you do *not* understand ——” she hesitated.

“Yes: I understand that Miss Neville is poor in this world’s wealth, and that you are rich; and that fortune has favoured you in all things—in wealth, in beauty, in high birth, and, not the least among your privileges, is the possession of such a friend,” he continued, forgetting, as he warmed upon the pleasing

theme of Mabel's perfections, that he was exceeding the bounds to which he had intended limiting himself.

"I do, indeed, believe that she loves me truly; but——"

"There is an under-current that runs counter to your own wishes, perhaps you would say. Am I right, Lady Florence?"

"I think you are rather determined in your endeavours to prove me in the wrong," she replied, smiling, and without the assumption of wounded pride Mr Dalrymple's steady investigation naturally tended to produce, for there was a certain amount of straightforward perception in his character, which enabled her to do ample justice to his superiority. She felt that she admired, while she feared him.

"Do not throw away your advantages, Lady Florence; but employ them in every possible

way for the good of others. Miss Neville has a mind, person, manners, as refined as your own."

"Certainly! I wish to be kind to her—I am fond of her; but the requirements of society are so exclusive—so exacting; indeed——"

"Say adieu to them then,—be yourself—and not the reflection of others," he said quickly. "No, pardon me, I am too hasty; but still, do not yield weakly to prejudice. I love that independence that is capable of making out a path for itself. You and your friend are both very young; but the elements of character have existed from infancy, and day by day are being consolidated. Those who profess the highest admiration for you seldom entertain you with such very serious conversation, perhaps."

“No : and why do you ?” she asked frankly.

“Because—I think I may have somewhat in my power—I should like to be allowed the privilege of influencing you for your good. I am nearly double your age.”

“You have taken an extraordinary office upon yourself.”

“Yes, I have given you, Lady Florence Trevelyan, a lecture upon pride and the duties of friendship, which, to refer to one of your observations, *I* do not consider moves in any particular element.”

“No, no ! I ought to feel very much offended, but I do not ; and yet you speak warmly of Miss Neville—she ought to be highly flattered.”

“I merely speak of her as of one amongst

many whose characters I have studied," he answered, coldly.

The little jealous alarm Lady Florence began to entertain was, by these few last words, happily dispelled, so prone are vanity and self-love to favourable interpretations of doubtful meanings. In reality, the conversation, though not directly flattering to herself, was anything but displeasing to her, and she felt upon the whole honoured and gratified by the apparent interest Dalrymple had taken in her.

"The office I have arrogated to myself so remorselessly is, believe me, far from being a pleasant one, it is so much easier to take everything calmly, to allow all kinds of misapprehensions to exist, to see such going on before your eyes of which you disapprove, than to apply a remedy; but if one can, by struggling hard, give a right bias to waver-

ing inclination, I consider the day not wholly lost, and so much of our precious time is wasted in this world."

"And yet it often hangs heavy on my hands. How can you remedy the evil of which my sisters were bitterly complaining this very morning?"

"I have not a panacea for curing ill, but I think if you endeavour as much as possible to makes others happy, say good-bye to selfishness, live for others, and——"

"Oh! you are prescribing impossibilities. Every one is for himself in the world in which we live. How can I alter the course of things?"

"Do not suppose that you can alter; for the taint of selfishness is on our nature,

and we can but strive hard to set our face a little against the current."

"Do you mean that we are never to enjoy ourselves? I promise when I am old and wrinkled to spend all my time in visiting the poor, in working hard at charity schools; but in the meanwhile," and she turned towards her companion, her beautiful face beaming with youth's fascinations, "in the meanwhile, tell me how I can make a compromise?"

"I do not mean to preach a sermon, and to tell you that you may not live to become old and wrinkled, but do not allow pleasure to be your first object in life."

For one moment Lady Florence appeared thoughtful. "I have no wish to excuse myself, but it seems to me that the whole

world, at least the world in which I live, does only think of pleasure."

"And admiration?" he added.

"I do not think I care for admiration," she replied blushing, "except from those whose opinion I value."

"Depend upon it, it becomes as necessary to the woman of the world as her daily food. Perhaps you are hardly conscious of the influence it possesses over you."

"It is very delightful to please," she replied.

"And likewise to hear the praises of others."

"Yes, if they do not interfere with my own views."

"At least I must give you credit for candour, Lady Florence. We have touched

upon many topics, but not brought one to a point."

"No, but your suggestions may prove valuable. Tell me, do you practise what you preach?"

"Who ever did?" he replied gravely. "I am amongst the weakest of mankind. But I am privileged to have odd ways and ideas. I lead a solitary life."

"That is no excuse for you. I consider rudeness insufferable, and misanthropy tedious, and affected, but I think you have the art of expressing your opinions without offending. I suppose you and Miss Neville are very near neighbours, do you often meet?"

"Very seldom."

"Are you not a great friend?"

"Of her father and mother, yes."

"And you have been very kind, I believe.

I remember now, Mabel always spoke of you with such gratitude."

"With gratitude! gratitude is a cold word. I believe Miss Neville is never tired of owning her obligations to me." He said this in a tone of vexation, and endeavoured to turn the subject, but Florence continued.

"Does Miss Neville submit as quietly as I have done to the process of investigation you seem to patronise? or perhaps she is a pattern of perfection in your eyes."

Lady Florence felt she was guilty of an indiscretion, but was inclined to risk any thing that she might satisfy her curiosity, if possible, respecting Dalrymple's opinion of her friend. At that moment they were joined by Mabel herself, and by Lord Carlsfort, and the conversation became general during the remainder of the ride.

But Florence dwelt upon Dalrymple's words, not that she was in general particularly pleased to be found fault with, but the seed of an all-absorbing interest had been sown in her heart.

Young as she was, and worldly as were the examples and admonitions which were intended to influence her, Lady Florence had a natural bias towards the good, the great, the noble, and refined, and such, in her eyes, was Herbert Dalrymple.

With the kind of romance in her nature which led her to defy the very opinions to which she appeared to yield, and which were calculated to render her the slave of wealth and high name, she had a secret pleasure in manifesting a choice opposed to the usual routine of this splendid slavery, and gradually,

and with a power of whose strength she was ignorant, the idea began to haunt her by night and by day that it would be an honour worthy of her, beautiful and high-born as she was, to shine in the light reflected by such a man. There was nothing tender in the nature of this gradually expanding love,—it was impulsive, passionate, as befitted her character.

Yes ! from a man like Herbert Dalrymple, whom all must respect and bow down to, she could take rebukes, she could listen to his counsels, she could confess herself faulty, she could even stoop to ask for forgiveness, from one whom she so honoured, had she incurred his displeasure. But then she could brook no rival, no interference. Rival ! the words filled her with indignation ! Surely, no one could stand in such a position with respect to

her! Yet she pleased herself with thinking that Dalrymple was not one whom every woman could charm, that the very height at which she felt he ranged above the vain false crowd, was the true secret of the devotion he had won from her.

No one had ever spoken to her as he had done—no one had ever dared so to speak—and why had he?

The colour rose in her cheek as this thought rushed to her mind—a thought in which pleasure and pain were strangely mingled. Surely, if he had not felt a more than common interest in her, he would not have run the risk of her displeasure, and then, had he not always sought her? did not a thousand little well-remembered proofs tell the welcome tale of unmistakeable preference? Poor Mabel! In what friendly, but coldly friendly, terms

alone had he spoken of her. There was on his part towards her certainly no dislike, there was even a thorough appreciation of her amiable qualities, but between them decidedly a coolness existed, which she had remarked ever since Mabel's arrival at Molverley, and that betokened indifference at least.

Thus she reasoned with herself, but little did she investigate why, between herself and Mabel, no syllable concerning the feeling which was strengthening day by day was ever interchanged. Had she not a secret misgiving that a character of such strength, a disposition of such sweetness as Mabel's, must receive their due meed of approbation at Dalrymple's hands. She was not blind to her brother's hourly increasing admiration for her friend. Well, let that be. If her brother chose to make a misalliance, he was the best judge of

his own actions; besides, her heart whispered such an event would give a colour of approbation to the choice which, in the far off future, she contemplated making.

Thus had Dalrymple's sensitiveness, and Mabel's pride, the source of the misunderstanding which to both was darkening their days, given that direction to Lady Florence's secret thoughts, which Mabel, when she observed it at all, observed with pain.

And Dalrymple was really perhaps forgetting the sad experiences of his past life, and finding in Florence's society, in the untold fascinations of beauty and elegance, that heartfelt interest which, she could no longer disguise from herself, she had ever hoped to excite. She had no one to blame but herself. And now, how she did blame herself for allowing any displeasure on his part to rankle in her heart, as she was

conscious she had done, and to poison the happy, friendly intimacy which had formerly subsisted between them.

She felt anxious to return to the home of those dear ones, whose hearts would at all times be open to receive her ; but still a secret influence seemed to bind her to Molverley ; besides, the good, kind old Earl really looked to her now as his chief comfort. She would not leave him while she could so materially minister to his wants and wishes, and so she still remained Lady Florence's guest.

CHAPTER III.

“What nothing earthly gives or can destroy,
The Soul's calm sunshine, and the heartfelt joy,
Is Virtue's prize.”—POPE.

THE party at Meverley was diminishing by degrees. Lady Oldborough and her daughter, the Miss Langtons and even Mr Beverley, had taken their departure ; still Dalrymple was pressed to remain, nor did he seem unwilling to do so. In the mean time the reduced size of the party at Meverley only served to bring Lord Carlsfort's attentions to Miss Neville more permanently into view. Yet,

young as she was in worldly experience, she scarcely attached any real importance to them, and received them with such simplicity and lively good-humour that she only riveted more and more the Viscount's admiration.

One afternoon she was busily engaged in the Earl's sitting-room copying for Lord Carlsfort a sketch of one of his favourite hunters, the Earl himself was dozing as usual in his arm-chair, and Mabel had undertaken to be his companion, while the Countess and her two elder daughters were paying an electioneering visit at some distance from Melverley.

By Mabel's side sat Lord Carlsfort, watching her progress, his eyes intently fixed upon her as she bent her head over her drawing. She was so absorbed in her work and in her

own thoughts that she started as his voice, sounding close beside her, pronounced the word "Mabel." It was the first time he had thus addressed her. In a moment her cheek crimsoned, and strange, unwelcomed thoughts rushed through her mind, for his hand slightly, but with an unmistakeable pressure, touched hers, as for an instant it lay before him on the table—she withdrew it instinctively, and looked steadily at him, while surprise and even displeasure marked every feature.

That look might at once have told him all he sought to know had he been quick at reading countenances, and have dashed to the ground the hopes he had of late been so fondly indulging. Before a word of explanation could pass between them, the tête-a-tête was disturbed, to Mabel's great

delight, by the entrance of Lady Florence ready dressed for riding.

Lord Carlsfort rose, and even looked angrily at his sister, the feeling of her utter selfishness for a moment coming across him most unpleasantly.

"What, riding again, Florence, and leaving your friend as usual to take everybody's place in attendance upon my poor Father," he exclaimed.

"I am just come on purpose to ask Mabel, and you too, Henry, to join us. Mr Dalrymple is bent upon calling at Linstead to-day, and as my horse requires exercise, I thought it would be a pity not to make one more riding party before you all disperse."

"I had rather not go," said Mabel, as she bent her head over her drawing more intently

than before, "I promised Lady Merivale I would not leave this room until she returned."

"Oh, nonsense Mabel—any one can take your place, just for two hours—now do pray come."

At that moment Mr Dalrymple entered. He saw in a moment how things were, and finding that Mabel firmly resisted all Lady Florence's solicitations, forbore pressing her to go against her inclination, though his anxiety for her companion's trip, was some degrees stronger than even her friend's.

"Miss Neville is very kind," began Lord Carlsfort.

"No one denies it," hastily interrupted Florence; "we are of course all of us extremely obliged to you, Mabel, and you, too, dear Papa," she continued, as she went up to her

father's chair, and for a moment laid her blooming cheek close to his thin pale face.

"Yes, we are indeed all under obligations to Miss Neville—she is more than a daughter to me," replied the Earl.

Florence coloured, for these words contained a reproach, which she was conscious of deserving. The previous day's conversation upon selfishness, with Mr Dalrymple, recurred to her mind. Her eyes involuntarily met his. "We need not go far to seek for duties," he said, in a low tone.

"Let me stay, Mabel, if you will only take my place, I dare say my brother and Mr Dalrymple will accompany you."

But the Earl did not approve of this arrangement. Mabel was too great a favourite with him for her society to be so easily relin-

quished. No one arranged his cushions so comfortably, or read to him in so pleasant a voice. Miss Neville's thralldom would soon end, but an old man's blessing would be her's for ever.

Florence felt more and more annoyed with herself and with every one else—she felt the ride would no more give her pleasure—and taking up some work that lay upon the table, she sat down by her father, who had roused himself sufficiently to give certain directions to his son he had long wished to have executed. In the mean time Dalrymple had seated himself by Mabel, who was working away all this time very diligently. A thrill of pleasure passed through her heart as she saw him occupy the seat which had been Lord Carlsfort's, but she endeavoured to silence it, being more and more convinced, that she was in duty and

prudence bound to look upon Mr Dalrymple as merely a common acquaintance.

But if Dalrymple had ever felt inclined to own himself in the wrong, to quarrel with his own suspicious nature, now was the moment, overcome as he was by his thorough appreciation of the kind, unselfish ground-work of Mabel's character. He had gained a sufficient insight into it through many days of silent observation, as no exertion or self-devotion seemed to her too great when required to save her friend from irksome duty, or procure her any gratification.

Beverley, too, could not be the favoured individual he had supposed him, though the affair of the turquoise bracelet still remained a mystery—then all girls loved admiration! If only Lord Carlsfort were not a rival! He was in the happiest, the most amiable of moods

at this present moment—the misanthropic Herbert Dalrymple!

“Are you not glad to feel yourself of such real use, Miss Neville?” he began, in that peculiarly pleasant voice Mabel so dearly loved to hear.

Mabel assented, but she did not look up from her drawing. She had that very morning been tutoring herself with regard to her feelings towards Mr Dalrymple.

“Every one must prize an unselfish character,” he continued.

“Do not give me greater credit than I deserve. I am afraid I am not a whit less selfish than the world in general; it is only perhaps a greater pleasure to me to remain at home, when I can feel I am doing some slight good, than to pass every hour of every day in merely amusing myself.”

“ I think you are a strange contradiction,” he replied ; “ sometimes so bright and coquetish —sometimes so staid, serious, and persevering.”

She felt so pleased. There was a secret approbation, a kind of familiarity in his words which charmed her. But she merited nothing now more than formerly—she was determined to show him she thought him odd and capricious, if he thought her coquetish and contradictory. True it is that she had never known what was passing through his mind, while he appeared so cold and distant, she was totally ignorant of the cause of offence she had given him.

“ I think my character is not so very difficult to decipher as you imagine,” she said, looking up ; “ and as to your praise, if it is intended to give me pleasure, why have you

bestowed it of late in so very parsimonious a spirit ?”

“ Because — because ! there are moments when one loses one’s self-possession and control. You must not expect me to be always equally reasonable and unimpassioned.”

“ But I do expect you at least to be reasonable. Surely yours is not a character to which more than a small share of the caprice with which we are gifted should belong. A grave charge should only follow a grave offence — have you not implied a tacit rebuke to me, through your silence of late, your apparent displeasure—in short, your total change of manner.”

This was coming to the point ; and Mr Dalrymple, for the moment, made no reply. She almost wondered at her own boldness,

in thus expressing the feelings that had so imbittered to her the few last weeks. Now she was endeavouring to persuade herself that it was merely her love for truth and justice, which was at the bottom of this investigation. She felt an explanation of much that had occurred of late had become her due, since he had partly opened the way to it, though she would not have volunteered to demand one. She strove to hide that he had ever excited an interest in her heart. She felt a certain painful, strengthening struggle had been going on within, and now she could look steadily at him, and hoped that he saw in her a woman of strong feelings, perhaps, but one who could assert her independence and her privileges. Yet, in her deep, silent heart, how dear she felt he was to her—or might

have been, and even now—how she loved to know that he was near her, looking at her with the kind glance of old! No one had power to throw such expression into a look as he had!

And then many little memories crowded thick upon her, of playful words which she had used, to try, without intending, to wound his susceptibility; and she would openly—and oh! how willingly—have accused herself to him of all her misdemeanours, if she could think he really cared to know what was passing through her mind—if she had not thought that she was perfectly indifferent to him.

He broke in upon these quick thoughts. “I do so love—I mean, I appreciate your truth and candour, but I have no right to go further.

I have often thought over your words in our last meeting at the Glen. I had no right to expect you to receive me as your monitor."

"I think I have at least an equal right to expect you to treat me with patience and forbearance."

"You do not know how much I have exerted myself to combat my suspicions."

"What are you suspicious of? If you admire truth and candour in others, why not set a good example."

"You do not admit of any interference."

"No, not unless I find proper confidence reposed in me. Suppose I had permitted the same latitude to Mr Beverley, to Lord Carlsfort?" she added, with a slight degree of

malice, and knowing that she was touching upon rather a tender point.

“No doubt they deserve the same degree of confidence, perhaps, more than myself,” he replied, not without irritation in his manner at finding himself classed on a level with others. “Certainly, I have no wish to lead the way for either Mr Beverley or Lord Carlsfort. As a friend of your family long ago, I fancied you might have given me a certain preference over comparative strangers.” This was said coldly, and Mabel, waking as she fancied from a dangerous illusion, was only rejoiced that she had not been thrown further off her guard. He evidently wished only to be considered as a friend of her family. Of course she could not be expected to carry off the palm from her beautiful friend Florence. Pride on one hand,

and suspicion on the other, are the bane of a mutual understanding between those who in reality have the truest and deepest appreciation of each other. ,

“We shall never agree, Mr Dalrymple,” said Mabel, making an effort over herself to appear perfectly indifferent. “Life is too short to be always taken to task for one’s opinions and practices, we had better take it for granted that all is as it should be.”

“And that you are, and always have been, perfectly indifferent to me, I suppose,” said Dalrymple. “I should have known this long ago, if I had not been such a fool! Ah! that’s Terrence, I see, Lord Carlsfort’s favourite hunter. Have you seen how industriously Miss Neville is employed in your service, my lord?” he continued, addressing his friend, who was instantly at Mabel’s side. Lord

Carlsfort was in ecstasies with the likeness, everything Miss Neville did must be perfect, and he looked so happy, so perfectly at home while expressing his thanks, that Dalrymple turned away in a very different mood from that in which he had first approached Mabel.

But on Mabel's ear those last words still resounded. What had she done? How had she, by her unguarded love of mischief, assisted by her unconquerable pride, which was, at least as unamiable as it was dignified, how had she injured, disappointed, the keen feelings of the man whose opinion she so dearly prized, and ruined the happiness, perhaps, of her whole life? There was bitterness in the very thought—her cheek crimsoned, her hand trembled as she attempted to put a few finishing touches to the sketch before her.

She did not hear Lord Carlsfort's thanks, she replied at random to his observations, she only felt she had irrevocably offended Dalrymple. Had she been alone with him she would instantly have asked forgiveness, but Dalrymple had agreed to accompany Lord Carlsfort to Linstead, and *his* parting words were to Lady Florence. It is difficult to determine whether Mabel was most in his thoughts or in his friend's during their ride. It is certain that they talked upon the most indifferent subjects until they found themselves at Linstead. Mr Percival was at home.

CHAPTER IV.

"A man passes for what he is worth. What he is engraves itself on his face, on his form, on his fortunes, in letters of light which all men may read but himself —Concealment avails nothing."—EMERSON.

It may be easily imagined that Mr Percival Seymour, as we must now call him, had not been received on terms of friendly acquaintance by many of the leading families in the neighbourhood, who looked upon him only as the artful usurper of Charles Seymour's rights. The moment that seemed to have crowned the labours of months and years, had comparatively isolated him from his own species.

Some regarded him with suspicion, others with contempt, some with dislike. Lord Merivale in the kindness of his heart was amongst the few who tried to remove as much as possible the prejudice against him, and had now charged his son with an invitation to him to spend a few days at Molverley. It is difficult to define the exact motive which induced Dalrymple to wish to make personal acquaintance with Percival, a man whose character, from report, he thoroughly despised, but his friendly intimacy with, and pity for Seymour, urged him to overlook this aversion, in the hope that by vigorous representation of his deplorable case, he might work upon any latent feeling of honour or remorse Percival might still possess. Yet, as he entered the threshold of Linstead he shrunk from the step he was taking. Open vice he felt could be

guarded against, appearing as it must to all the world in its own hideous colours, but friendship masking hypocrisy and meanness, betraying the trust that had been reposed in it, was so foreign to Dalrymple's nature, that he would scarcely have started had Percival himself appeared to him at the moment in demon form.

Yet, if wealth could give happiness, Percival had acted wisely. Luxury surrounded him in every shape, but unfortunately prosperity had for ever banished happiness from his heart. The upbraidings of conscience were never silent. Not an hour passed of the day or of the long weary night in which Seymour's wrongs were not revenged, as was apparent to every one, even to those the least acquainted with the Percival of former days.

He had grown suddenly old—bowed as if

a heavy illness had passed over him—his eye was quick and glaring, and unsteady in its gaze, furrows were on his brow, his manner was eager and restless. He was always shrinking from solitude, yet was miserable and ill at ease in society.

The two friends were shown into the library, the room from which old Sir Philip Seymour had loved to contemplate his own domain, the home he prized so dearly and so proudly, that it was almost as a stumbling-block between him and eternity. Nevertheless, could he have witnessed or foreseen the misery of which he was in reality the author, perhaps even his prejudices might have yielded to the affection he had entertained for his disinherited nephew.

Some influence had been at work which had tended to alter the appearance of the

room in which Lord Carlsfort and Dalrymple were awaiting the entrance of the present master of the house. Old-fashioned high-backed oak chairs were exchanged for the modern comforts of sofas, "fauteuils," &c., while the ancestral portraits had been removed to make way for various highly-coloured specimens of historical or landscape painting.

A few moments and the door opened—Mr Seymour entered.

"Mr Percival Seymour, Mr Dalrymple," said Lord Carlsfort, kindly, as the goodness of his heart made him look more in pity than in scorn on the rich parvenu whom none even envied.

Mr Percival Seymour! It was impossible! that name did not bring back to Dalrymple any memory of former years, but the outline

of those features, altered as was their expression, did, and so did those dark eyes once so keen, bright, and flashing, now so sunken and fearful-looking. They were not to be forgotten; nor were the tones of that voice, soft but not pleasing, monotonous, not musical, heard for the first time. With the feeling, as if fascinated by the eye of a basilisk, did Dalrymple fix a searching, terrible look upon the man who stood before him. While, as in his bronzed cheek the colour went and came, he listened without any acknowledgement of Mr Seymour's words of welcome.

Welcome, did *that* man dare to welcome *him* to his usurped home.

A deadly paleness overspread Seymour's face, as he returned Dalrymple's steady gaze. They had met, yes, they had known each

other, long, long years ago, in youth, in boyhood, before experience or trials had cast any shadow upon heart or brow. What had in the mean time been their secret history, was known to them, and to them alone, as each read in the other's countenance, the unmistakeable evidence of what was passing within. Not being very eloquent in speech, and besides being on this particular day very much preoccupied with his own thoughts, after the first few words of introduction, and having briefly mentioned the object of his visit to Mr Percival Seymour, Lord Carlsfort had moved away towards the further end of the room, commissioning Dalrymple to second the invitation he had given the latter to Molverley. The late Baronet had been a great friend of his father's, and it was not without some emotion that he considered the

change time had effected, as he looked out from the old man's favourite seat in the large bay windows, upon the expanse of wood and plain, which stretched out before him. Little did he guess what was passing through the minds of the two other inhabitants of the old library, while he was buried in an unusual reverie.

For some moments Dalrymple and Percival seemed rooted to the one spot on which they stood.

"I have at length found you, after long years," muttered Dalrymple, in accents so trembling with emotion that they were scarcely audible.

Whatever were Percival's inward feelings, he had evidently the master-spirit of dissimulation over Dalrymple.

"Yes! long years have indeed passed, and

brought great and important changes with them," he replied, exercising great self-command. "Fortune has been variable, as usual; and I believe has favoured us equally."

"You do not dare to name me in the same breath with yourself," spoke Dalrymple's proud spirit; then, as he bent his scrutinising glance still upon Percival's face, he continued, more calmly, "But it is all well—there is ever compensation for all wrongs, even in this world—strong and stern retribution, is there not Maynard? Age has not thus changed you? No! some deeper influence has been at work."

"Maynard! That name is, indeed, associated with many curious and not altogether pleasant reminiscences," replied the latter, with a forced laugh, while his brow contracted and his eyes glared almost fiercely.

“ I have often contemplated this meeting. I had hoped it might have been spared me. And you have consummated, filled up the iniquitous measure. It has not brought you happiness ! But the past ! let it be blotted out. I spare you ! ”

“ There must be some misunderstanding between us, Mr Dalrymple,” said Percival, calmly ; and, as if appealing to the more reasonable feelings of the man, whom for a moment excitement had mastered, “ I will willingly explain all, if you will, for a short time, listen patiently.”

“ No, not now—not now. I repeat—it is all past—it is as a dream. I wished for ever to have fled from you—for years your image haunted me, but now I can pity, even forgive.”

Percival had sunk into a chair. Dalrymple,

as he contemplated his wasted, haggard appearance, could with truth say that he pitied, even forgave him. His noble nature shrunk from adding further torture to that inflicted by conscience. For all was past—all with its sweetness and its bitterness, and its lessons of hardly-earned experience; and he who had suffered, as natures such as his alone can suffer, was happy—beyond comparison happy. Ah! beautiful, once beloved, unfortunate, deserted Mabel Stewart!—where was she? Memories were coming vividly before him, and he was living over again that time, when first love had poured out its deep treasures before him. He could bear to think of all (for time does soften all sorrows), but of *his* treachery and *her* wrongs. He could bear to think of it, for was he not now playing over again that dangerous game no longer with the light, sharp,

brittle weapons of boyhood, but with the strong, powerful, determined grasp of mature years !

But Lord Carlsfort's reverie was over, and having settled in his own mind that the conversation, of which he had caught a few words, was at least interesting, if not agreeable to his two companions, who had discovered each other to be old acquaintances, he came forward, and exchanging a few more words with Mr Percival Seymour, he received his promise that he would join the party at Molverley the following week, and, with Dalrymple, took his leave.

That evening Dalrymple was a changed being. Neither Lady Florence's bright smiles, nor the Countess's friendly condescension, nor Lord Carlsfort's good-natured raillery, could win him back from his own deep thoughts.

No! nor even Mabel in her repentant mood, as she every now and then—longing to make amends for the few hasty words she had spoken—addressed to him some casual remark, as an opening for further conversation. Even his favourite songs which she sang were all but unheeded. Nor was Mabel (not guessing what had passed) on the whole displeased. If she had thus wounded his susceptibility, she was not, she could not, be indifferent to him; but how was a reconciliation to be brought about?

Even had she wished to seek one, there seemed no opportunity for any private explanation; besides, he had offended her, she did not wish to appear humbled! suing for a return to favour!

In the mean time Lord Carlsfort was constantly at her side, for there was to be a

ball at Molverley the following evening, to which the whole neighbourhood had been invited, and Miss Neville's taste must be consulted respecting the necessary arrangements, and Lord Carlsfort, who was only happy in her shadow, and under her directions, eagerly sought every opportunity of appealing to her judgment, bringing her prominently forward, to the annoyance of Lady Matilda in particular. In short, everything seemed to go wrong with every one except with Lady Florence, who was comparatively content, so that Mabel did not engross any part of Mr Dalrymple's attention.

To this ball Mabel had once looked forward with almost childish pleasure, for she loved music and dancing, and all was so new to her in life, but her feelings had changed, she scarcely knew how, or rather she scarcely chose to

acknowledge to herself the real secret of the change. But others were preparing for enjoyment, she knew, and selfishness was not in her nature, so she helped to ornament the dancing rooms, arranging flowers and festoons, until Lord Carlsfort pronounced every thing was perfect which had grown under her hands. The long-looked-for evening had arrived, and a vast assemblage of beauty and fashion, and the usual mixture of simplicity, affectation, refinement, and vulgarity, were filling the spacious rooms at Molverley,—and in the novel excitement of the moment, Mabel looked as light and as happy as if all her thoughts were centred upon pleasing Lord Carlsfort, who had engaged her for one of the first dances, and who was secretly resolved that the evening should not come to an end without his hopes or fears with regard to the object of his

admiration being placed upon a sure footing, for he had his doubts.

Mabel, on the contrary, was determined that she would, if possible, give him no opportunity of renewing the conversation which Lady Florence had, fortunately, interrupted; and she succeeded, for the time, in warding off all the little compliments which Lord Carlsfort readily showered upon her, dancing with partner after partner, with a light step but a heavy heart, for Dalrymple had never approached her, though his eye more than once had rested upon her. And now was stealing across her heart that miserable feeling of loneliness in the midst of a crowd, of heaviness in contrast with gaiety, which seems to say that all around is but a counterfeit of joy and pleasure.

Dalrymple rarely danced, but he, too, had duties to perform which must precede self-

gratification. Lady Florence was a perfect waltzer, and she looked so splendidly handsome that, admirer of beauty as he was, he could not help, contrary to his custom, asking her to dance to the inspiring music. Then followed a short tête-à-tête, then (for Mabel was engaged) another waltz, until poor Mabel actually found herself answering at random all the questions her partner was putting to her, and hoping that the ball would soon come to an end, that she might flee to her own room. In another moment the waltz was ended—her partner led her to a seat, and for the first time that evening Dalrymple was standing beside her. He made no apology, he did not seem to think one necessary. Joy sprang up again in Mabel's heart. She tried to hide her pleasure, but she could not succeed, and he sat down beside her.

"Now tell me truly this evening are you happy? If not—why not?"

"No. You know I am not happy. I did not know a ball could be made so disagreeable a thing. I never wish to go to another."

"Do not blame the poor ball," and Dalrymple smiled that gentle approving smile which Mabel loved so dearly. "I am sure a ball-room is a place just suited to you."

"No, no; at least, I think not. I have never felt more miserable."

"Yet you have been courted, admired—that pleases you—all love admiration."

"You know I do not care for admiration," and a tear half of vexation, half of overwrought feeling, came into her eye—"you know I am very unhappy, and—and you are very unkind, and unforgiving."

Was she really unhappy! Why did she think him unkind, unforgiving. He came nearer to her, he could have knelt down beside her, at that moment. All was forgotten, all his cold jealous suspicion, his resolutions, his experience, and distrust of what was lovely and enchanting, but he did not speak, he waited to hear her voice once more.

“I am afraid I have displeased you, I have been so proud, and irritable, though indeed, you have given me cause.”

He could scarcely believe that Mabel, the young, bright, admired, proud, coquettish Mabel, had spoken these words—how delightful beyond expression was the feeling that at length confidence might be restored, and that he had been capricious and unjust. But

he said calmly, "I had promised myself to be your friend when you were first about to enter this world of Molverley, but I soon found I had deceived myself with the idea that I had a right to such a privilege, and then one circumstance occurred, and then I fancied another, all trivial in themselves, but proofs convincing. However, I did keep my promise."

"And the result was—— You *say* you read character quickly."

"I fancied—I will not let you into the secret of all my discoveries, but I fancied that you were a coquette at heart."

"And you gave me no credit for feeling, for proper self-possession, or any justifiable spirit? I have decided that you are very despotic."

“Perhaps so—where I set no bounds to my expectations, yet, I have been taught by disappointment. That bracelet, it was a present from Mr Beverley, was it not? I was accidentally with him, when he chose it in Paris.” He pointed to the turquoise bracelet which encircled her arm, and which he was now half-ashamed of owning had caused him so much annoyance.

“That bracelet,” Mabel laughed, “a present from Mr Beverley! Mr Dalrymple, is it thus you read character? You have proved yourself a false magician in this instance at least. Poor Mr Beverley! he little thought what mischief he was occasioning by executing my unfortunate commission.”

Dalrymple looked pleased, surprised. “It is my turn then to own myself in the wrong.

I must thank you for the lesson, and the example you have set me; still there is much yet unexplained."

"But suppose I am not equally inclined to satisfy all the demands of your jealous majesty," she said, laughing.

"There cannot be any happiness without confidence, where confidence is so earnestly desired."

"But confidence should, like charity, believe all things," she said seriously.—"Surely jealousy is a hard task-master."

"Ah! the young and beautiful like perfect liberty, total absence from all restraint, do they not? They think they may trifle with all that is most sacred, most devoted; when they wish to retrace their steps, they may find that all is changed, their reign of power may be over, harshness, or at least indifference, may

have replaced the tenderness and indulgence they had counted upon."

"In what a position you have placed the young and beautiful! But pray consider in your turn that you favoured mortals—and you are—you superior beings, who think to reign so despotically over our weaker woman kind, have need to be very watchful lest you should outstep the bounds allotted to you. May we never retaliate? are we to be now courted and worshipped, and then capriciously deserted?"

Mabel had courageously dared to bring her cause before, and lay it at the feet of the very man from whom, but a few hours previous, she had striven to hide all her secret feelings.

"Angels as they are, women are formed for endurance; we are taught to command and look for obedience," he said, smiling.

"And we will yield obedience where it is deserved—but not even to the man I idolized would I be a slave."

"Respect, esteem, and love would enslave your heart to the man you idolized," he replied, looking steadily at her, "and once yielded, every further step would be easy to such a nature as yours; every purpose, every thought and act, would tend to one end to secure what you prized. Until such an end be in view, I fancy that the life of feeling in you is like a butterfly's existence, bright, beautiful, but transient."

"Now, if you can read the past, explain to me the present and the future."

He had no time to reply, for their long conversation was interrupted by another waltz being played, for which Mabel knew she was engaged to Lord Carlsfort. As she rose from

her chair, she observed that Lady Florence was seated opposite at some little distance, whence in truth, unseen by Mabel and Mr Dalrymple, she had, in no very happy mood, cast many an uneasy glance towards them, buried, as they appeared to be, entirely in the interesting topics upon which they were touching ; and now, as she approached Mabel, she gave her a look of mingled annoyance and confusion, informing her that her brother had spent the last half-hour in searching for her through all the crowded intricacies of the ball-room. Mabel hastily apologised for the trouble she had unintentionally given, and soon she was led by Lord Carlsfort through the moving throng, her feet scarcely seeming to touch the ground, while one hand rested upon his shoulder. Her white dress, visible at intervals, was, as it were, a beacon to Dalrymple, whose

eyes followed her with a love to which no expression had yet been given.

In the mean time Florence had turned away, and refusing all invitations to dance, she remained for some time a prey to the most unhappy thoughts. Mr Dalrymple could then be otherwise than the cold, guarded, almost indifferent being, he had generally appeared to Mabel. She had seen his eyes bent upon her with a look they had never before expressed—and also the change in Mabel's expressive countenance—answering some appeal, of the nature of which she was ignorant; she had observed that he had quietly, and uninvited, seated himself beside her, and, as if by the mere effort of his strong will, had forced her to refuse several invitations to dance while he remained. Then came back to her the

remembrance of many words, when (it might be off his guard) he had spoken highly in Mabel's favour; she thought, too, of the little scene a few days previous, which had taken place in her father's sitting-room. Had she been blinded by her own vanity and self-love? Would Mabel be, indeed, found to be a rival! Was it possible that she should supplant her?——

“Have you enjoyed your ball to-night, dear Flo.? I hope you have,” said Mabel, as she passed by her friend's room an hour or two later, while the early morning dawned upon the now ended night's festivities. Florence's cheek was flushed—her eyes bore traces of tears. She did not ask Mabel to sit down beside her, though her friend threw her arms round her, and looked at her sorrowfully.

“ You have been so, so much admired, dear Florence; every one said how beautiful you are.”

Every one! Mabel did not ask—she did not dare to seek to know the cause of her unhappy mood. It was a strange contrast to the joy that shone in her own heart. All was understood between them, yet neither spoke her own feelings—their days of intimacy were ended—still, to Mabel, Florence was the friend to whom she would have sacrificed—No! *that* sacrifice which rose up before her was not demanded of her. Neither mentioned Dalrymple’s name, and thus they parted.

Mabel was happy! happier than she had ever been before. Yet her happiness was not unclouded. Intuitively she felt that disappointment had buried its keenest darts in the heart of her friend. And then Lord Carlsfort,

kind and amiable as he was, yet to her totally uninteresting—how she dreaded the moment, hitherto warded off, when she must so coldly repay all his interest in her. Not a shadow of gratified vanity crossed her heart, as she felt that she had, without any pains, won that which so many she knew had coveted in vain.

But Herbert Dalrymple's words still sounded in her ears. They were a key to much that had passed since she first came to Molverley. He had confessed to being swayed by a weakness she despised. He had watched over her, but, if in kindness, it was also with mistaken notions, regarding her thoughtless intimacy with Mr Beverley; and he probably also considered himself injured, by every advance Lord Carlsfort had succeeded in making in her good opinion. Her foolish, girlish heart whispered

she would not be slavishly controlled, even by Herbert Dalrymple: she did not yet know the luxury of obedience to one she loved.

She longed, yet dreaded, to meet him again the following morning, as partly from fatigue and partly from the over-excitement of a strange happiness, she found it impossible to sleep, and resolved upon refreshing herself by an early walk before the rest of the party should assemble for breakfast. To her surprise, as she quietly came down stairs, she saw a travelling carriage was at the door. It was Dalrymple's! He had received a sudden summons to hasten home on pressing business, and was already in the hall making preparations for his departure. She felt greatly disappointed. What would Meverley be without him? What business could be so very pressing? How long would he remain away? and why was her

newly-found, unaccomplished feeling of happiness to be brought to so sudden a standstill? She had so much to say to him—the weeks they had passed together at Melverley had not brought them into contact as closely as those few words had done the preceding evening. Formerly she could have expressed any amount of regret at his sudden departure—but now, as he came up and looked kindly and earnestly at her, and asked her what had disturbed her at so early an hour after the night's fatigue, she could only say a few hesitating words, the meaning of which on the whole was the very reverse of what was passing through her mind. Now she would have given anything to have avoided this meeting—but Mr Dalrymple would surely know it was purely accidental. He seemed to guess her thoughts.

The servants were hurrying to and fro, but for one moment they were alone.

“ I cannot be long away,” he said, quickly, “ for life is beginning to wear once more for me too sweet an aspect, my own Mabel !”

These words sufficed. What intense happiness to listen to them, to feel, think, and remember whose lips had spoken them, long after the carriage had driven off, and had left her standing alone, amid the creations of the beautiful fanciful world which had risen up around her. How far more valuable was his love than the admiration of the whole world besides. Now how easy was it to trace the secret workings of her heart in all the little incidents which had excited either pleasure or pain during her late visit to Molverley. She had been vain, self-opinionated, undeserving of such happiness. But it was all real. He was

no trifier, he was truth itself, in look, in word, in thought.

But with her own, her friend's feelings were sadly contrasted. She did not know that Lady Florence had witnessed her hurried adieu to Mr Dalrymple, as they had stood together upon the hall steps, that she had even watched her own retreating figure, as full of her intense happiness she wandered far away into the beautiful park to commune with herself and dwell upon every look and word of him whose feelings towards herself could be no longer doubtful. It was fortunate at the moment that she did not realize to its full extent the bitterness of her friend's despair, the agony of the discovery that she was nothing, that Mabel was beloved !

Lady Florence felt maddened, hopeless, as all pride vanishing and scarcely identifying herself as Lady Florence Trevelyan, she burst

into an agony of tears. That Mabel should be triumphant, and witness her humiliation. It was beyond endurance. Then came a contest between inclination and principle, not between duty and feeling, but pride and love. Then she tortured herself with the recollection of words and actions, slight in themselves, but all bearing in her memory the impress of the motives which had prompted them. He could not have been blind—she had but been made the tool to cover his predilection for another. She had betrayed herself, and must be for ever degraded in his eyes.

But she should have a certain revenge. Her brother had been trifled with, surely he must, and would, call Dalrymple to account. But this was a foolish thought! Would revenge satisfy her love, and give her what her heart desired? She was resolved that no one should

read her thoughts, for pity and compassion were hateful to her.

Kind, unselfish Mabel! How painful was it to her to see herself avoided, coldly repulsed, when she longed to pour out to her friend the whole history of her affectionate sympathy, but it would have been mockery to attempt it. Yet she could scarcely believe in the suddenness of Lady Florence's attachment. Their natures were so different. What with Mabel was the growth of days, weeks, and months, of deep regard and admiration, what had dawned so gently upon her that she scarcely knew she now stood in the soft bright sunshine of first love, had been with Florence a passion not the less real, that it had risen up notwithstanding the opposing influence of her home circle.

Mabel was thankful that she had been, and still was, so much left to her own reveries, in the

attendance on the invalid Earl, she had so kindly undertaken. But her visit was drawing to a close; in a few more days she intended returning home. The diminished party at Molverley was, on the whole, rather happily broken in upon by the arrival of Mr Percival Seymour, according to Lord Carlsfort's invitation, nor was it displeasing to the former to find that Dalrymple had quitted Molverley. A sudden reaction seemed to have taken place in him, he roused or endeavoured to rouse himself from the state of depression which had lately become natural to him, and was the first to enter into any scheme of amusement that was proposed. Indeed he was pronounced to be an agreeable companion, and an acquisition to the neighbourhood. Even Lady Florence, whose pale looks and depressed spirits were, by her mother and sisters, attributed to the

dullness of a country life, rallied in his society, and Mabel, whose untiring eyes were ever watchful of her friend, really began to hope that she had been mistaken, and that, after all, she was indifferent to Mr Dalrymple.

CHAPTER V.

“ Far over cliff and surge
Swept the deep sound;
Making each wild wind's dirge
Still more profound.”

WHATEVER opportunities had offered themselves, Lord Carlsfort, through an undefined fear, had still delayed making the avowal to Mabel Neville, in which his future happiness was so much involved. Sometimes he lingered in the sunshine of hope—now again thought he had discovered, and truly, a key to her apparent indifference to himself, in her predilection for his friend Dalrymple—still before the close of

her visit the important words *must* be spoken.

It was a bright December day—following an unusually prolonged season of rainy and stormy weather. Every brook had become a torrent—every waterfall was of overgrown dimensions. The dreary wintry scenery was invested with unwonted picturesque attractions, and Lord Carlsfort, who knew Mabel's love of all that was interesting and beautiful in nature, had induced her to leave, for once, her station by the side of the invalid Earl, and accompany a large party that had been formed to visit a place in the neighbourhood, called the Giant's Cave. Mabel felt in the highest spirits. Mr Dalrymple was expected to return to Melverley that afternoon, and she had yielded, not wholly reluctantly, to Lord Carlsfort's persuasions, at the same time determining that her

conversation should be tolerably equally divided between himself, Mr Percival, Seymour, Capt. Sparkes, and others.

The scenery was sufficiently beautiful to attract the attention of even the most unromantic, and the most preoccupied. At first the road wound through a deep glade, and mid-way across the wooded height that rose on either hand—the gathered clouds were dissolving before the sun's touch, as it lit up pinnacles of rock, and the brown remnants of heather and yellow gorse. The small rivulet had overflowed its banks, carrying away with it portions of the narrow pathway, and in some places was broad and tranquil enough to reflect the woods and hills seen in the far distance. Now and then the passage was obstructed by masses of rock, which had been detached by the late inundation, until, at length, on near

approach to the Giant's Cave, the whole party, numbering from ten to fifteen, came fairly to a stand-still. Change of scene and of society often produces strange effects. The timid at times become bold, the silent talkative. Trivial annoyances, which to so many stand in lieu of real troubles, are forgotten, or sink into insignificance, and the hand of good-fellowship is often extended to those whose views and temper are in general unsuited.

Such was the case on the present occasion. Mabel talked and joked with Lord Carlsfort, without the slightest effort, as if he were the mere pleasant acquaintance of a few days. Percival's evil genius seemed quite to have deserted him, as he drew forth all Lady Matilda's powers of conversation; and Lady Flora, excited by the novelty of the scene, and

the chance of danger, which some weak nerves magnified into certain annihilation, forgot, for the moment, the late painful episode in her life as she encouraged Major Dallas to relate many an adventure which he had got up for the amusement of his next dinner party.

At length, all the oracles pronounced that it was impossible to proceed further, even on horseback, and some urged that the visit to the cave, at all times fraught with danger, was to-day a work of folly and madness, as a mass of rock, following the example of those which had already stopped up the pathway, might suddenly roll down from the high overhanging crags, and perhaps block up the adventurous explorers within the cave's dark and unknown precincts. This certainly did not seem a pleasant, or at all an unlikely possibility, for many large trees had been thrown up by the roots

by the late storms ; some lay scattered beneath, others were hanging across ledges of rock, around which their roots had for long years entwined themselves, and every now and then the torrent carried away large fragments of wood and stone, in its swift overwhelming course. It was a scene of wild beauty—and Lady Florence and Mabel's adventurous spirits were thoroughly aroused.

In the meantime, and while a long consultation was held as to future proceedings, Mr Percival Seymour, whose nature ill brooked delay, and who was in reality recklessly bold, determined to ride round a lower ledge of rock than that which had been mounted, and decide for himself upon the possibility of exploring the cave through another entrance.

Lady Florence and Mabel also determined upon a tour of discovery. Where Mabel led,

of course Lord Carlsfort followed. Those who remained behind had at least the consolation of feeling that they were acting the more prudent part.

With two attendants bearing a torch each, Lord Carlsfort reached his sister and her companion just in time to accompany them through the first intricacies of the outer cave, for nature had divided it into several compartments, leading into each other by narrow winding passages, and ending in a long low kind of gallery, which was supposed to go a considerable way under ground, and thought by the superstitious to be the abode of evil spirits, who invariably consigned the unwary wanderer to a watery grave.

It may be imagined that, for the moment, all past and personal feelings were forgotten by the two friends, who seemed wholly

impressed by the beauty and grandeur of the surrounding scene, but bold as he was in reality, Lord Carlsfort could not divest himself of fear for his two enterprising companions, lest they should lose their way in the intricacies of the cave, whose subterraneous and fearful grandeur was faintly illuminated by the glimmer of torch-light. Being a few yards in advance, and at the entrance of the gallery before mentioned, Lady Florence called upon her brother to follow, while Mabel, determined not to be outdone, accompanied by one torch-bearer, was guided towards a spot a little distance off where a small opening overhead threw one long ray of light upon the stalactite wall and roof. Scarcely had the echo of Lady Florence's words died away, when a low rumbling noise was heard as of an earthquake, followed by a thunder-like roll, which vibrated

far and near through the cavern, and at length ceased, to make the consequent stillness appear by contrast only more awful. In a moment, too, all was darkness, for the superstitious and terrified torch-bearers, totally forgetful of their duty, had fled at the first sound to secure, as they fancied, self-preservation, leaving Lord Carlsfort and his two companions to escape as best they could.

“Stay, Miss Neville, Florence! for heaven’s sake remain where you are, and all will be safe,” exclaimed Lord Carlsfort; “only wait until I bring back those cowardly fellows with their torches. It is only the outer part of the rock which has fallen, and, fortunately, not in this direction.” But all was silent, awfully silent. He listened attentively—then moved a few steps forward; he was now facing an angle of rock, from which an opening led on

either side. The next moment Florence's voice distinctly caught his ear. Thank God she was safe, but Mabel! where was Mabel! They had not been very far distant when the loud crash was heard, but from that time all was darkness; she might have endeavoured to retrace her steps in the terror of the moment. Florence could give no further account of her.

“Miss Neville! Mabel,” only say you are safe, for mercy say so,” exclaimed Lord Carlsfort in agony, and made the cavern ring with her repeated name. But all was silent. He did not dare to move far from the spot on which he stood, expecting every moment that some of the party outside, on becoming aware of their forsaken condition, would come to their rescue, in company with the cowardly torch-bearers. Florence trembled—she could scarcely forbear sinking into her brother's arms, when

she managed to rejoin him. In the midst of that awful solitude, it was a comfort to put her hand in his, to feel near some living human being. For a moment terror completely mastered her, her old affection for Mabel returned, as her base ingratitude, and jealousy of her rose to her mind, and a horrible idea overcame her, that perhaps she had met with an untimely end, while a merciful hand had been stretched out over herself.

A faint stream of light was now seen in the direction of the entrance to the cave. Again they called upon Mabel, but no voice was heard in return.

“Can she be deluding us, torturing us, repaying me for all my thoughtless unkindness? —no, no, perhaps she wishes to call forth the energy of our friendship, — of your love, Carlsfort,” she hesitated.

“Love! Do not name such a word—it is but a mockery—love! do I love her? She is dearer to me than life itself.”

“And she loves.”

Hush! there was a sound of footsteps, of many voices, the light from several torches spread around, throwing long fantastic shadows upon the low vaulted roof and floor, and foremost, scarcely touching the ground as he sprang along, was seen one figure, now for a moment lost to sight behind a huge stone pillar, and now emerging into the full blaze of the red light until he found himself at the side of Lady Florence and her brother. It was Herbert Dalrymple.

Scarcely heeding them, he pronounced but one word, Mabel, and, snatching up a torch from one of the bystanders, plunged into the depth of the cave. The rest followed, led by

Lord Carlsfort, stopping at every angle and turn, listening breathlessly for the slightest sound. A fear and dread seemed to have crept over every heart. If no accident had happened, why had Mabel disappeared? why did she not answer to her anxiously and often-repeated name? At length the passage took a sudden turn, and as Dalrymple advanced, now hoping, now in despair, and longing, yet dreading to end the terrible suspense of the moment, to his inexpressible delight he heard a faint voice, and now the light had lit up her pale face, with its expression of mingled pain, thankfulness, and joy.

All was soon explained. When first left in total darkness she had endeavoured to grope her way back to the entrance of the long gallery, guided by the faint light over head,

but her foot slipped, and she had fallen, fainting from extreme pain.

It was not a moment for many words. All was now happiness and unspeakable gratitude, and Dalrymple was beside her pale, breathless form, conscious only of the mercy which had sent him to her rescue, for she had become dearer to him than any being on earth—for all had done their work. Days and nights of outwardly cold watchfulness, short gleams of sunshine, when for the moment a feeling of confidence had been re-established between them, the last short conversation, and parting, all had told him that in Mabel Neville his happiness was centred.

“I must not leave you again if you cannot take better care of yourself,” he whispered, as he placed his arms round her, and carried her

out of the cave, not bringing any one into consultation, as if he alone had the right to deliberate and act.

Lord Carlsfort, Florence, and the rest followed, some slowly and carefully, some hurrying onwards, as if anxious to escape from this subterranean abode, all more or less interested in commenting upon Mabel's accident, and Mr Dalrymple's fortunate appearance.

But from the moment in which Lady Florence had caught the expression of his countenance, and read there a depth of anxiety, and subsequently of joy never before seen, all elasticity of youth and spirit seemed to have fled from her heart. Even thankfulness for Mabel's safety had given way before the deeper, sterner feelings of passionate jealousy.

She was leaning upon her brother's arm.

He was pondering over the late circumstances, nor had they failed to instruct him. He was no longer blind—Dalrymple loved Mabel, and she—there could be no hope for him!

“Your thoughts are not very happy ones, my poor brother?” said Lady Florence, as she looked up into his face. “Mabel has been playing her over-deep games, you may rest assured!”

“I acquit Miss Neville of everything. She is perfect—angelic—but I have been blinded. She is not one to be taken with the advantages I am able to offer her. I had hoped—”

“Hope nothing. It was all very pleasant to be the object of your attentions, but when Mr Dalrymple is a competitor—trust me, Henry, and thank me for saving you from further humiliation.”

"I care not for the humiliation, only I had been indulging one sweet dream. To be prized, to be loved for one's self alone! Such an one I had long sought—such an one is Mabel Neville—but all is lost—I feel it now. I have had my misgivings, but hoped against hope. She deserves happiness."

"And she will find it with Mr Dalrymple! You are my generous, high-minded brother!" she continued, feeling for the moment her own inferiority. But her secret was her own. To no human being had she divulged it, yet she felt strangely drawn towards her brother, who had never so much excited her affection or her admiration. Should she confide in him? No! *She* could not humble herself. His nature was not like her's. He could not know what love, such as her's, was.

"It is only misery—a mockery!" she said,

as if speaking to herself. "Love is but a play-thing—an unreality; and you have found it so. Come, let us hasten on—the chill of this damp darkness pierces into my very heart! Now, you will not regret taking my advice, if I have at all altered your determination, Henry."

She pointed to a ledge of rock, as they emerged again into the open daylight. Mabel was there, and Dalrymple at her side. Her arm rested upon his. Her face was still pale, but turned towards him, with an expression of happiness it was not difficult to interpret, while he looked as if he knew that he was privileged to shield her henceforth from all fear and danger.

Lord Carlsfort approached them.

"He has saved you; he was destined to save you, and he deserves your gratitude," he

said, feelingly, as he shook hands with Dalrymple, scarcely trusting himself to look steadily at Mabel's pale face, while his voice had lost something of its usual manly tone. He continued:

"Miss Neville, one of my sisters will ride your horse, while you take her place in the carriage, for I am sure you are suffering."

She thanked him, with a gratitude she could not express, for his generous friendship was invaluable to one whose only regret was that she could not return his love. A few moments had sufficed to tell Lord Carlsfort the whole truth, but he said nothing which could lead Dalrymple to suppose he looked upon him as his fortunate rival, for all his energies were now directed to the re-arrangement of the order of march homewards, for the short winter's

day was beginning to close in, and many miles had to be got over before reaching Molverley.

Suddenly he recollected that one of the party was missing. It was Mr Percival Seymour. He had not been seen since he had started alone on a voyage of discovery.

“Percival!” exclaimed Dalrymple: “he was riding—”

“A bay horse!” said Mabel. “He was determined upon exploring another entrance to the cave. But what makes you look so strange? surely we have had enough to do with fear for one day.”

‘Hush! I have a fearful misgiving of evil As I rode up in haste, I observed his horse—the bay he was riding to-day. It was galloping past me. It must have been immediately after the loud report of the falling mass of rock,

which has been the cause of all our fear and anxiety, and of your accident, he continued, hastily. "Miss Neville, I leave you in charge of Lord Carlsfort a few minutes, and I shall satisfy myself—this place is well known to me."

Mabel's directions, in regard to prudence, were lost upon him, as he darted off without further preamble in the direction of the lower ledge of rocks before mentioned, not taking the path along which a good rider could just manage to guide a sure-footed horse; but he climbed over rocks and through thickets, until he stood facing the entrance to the cave on the other side of the hill.

Lord Carlsfort's surmises proved true. A large fragment of rock had been detached from above, and rolling over the hollow, echoing roof, had finally reached the pathway below,

strewing fragments in its course, and filling up a great part of the natural, narrow bed of the swollen rivulet.

Thus much it was not difficult to determine. A strange horror filled his mind, as he observed beneath fresh traces of a horse's foot. So far, but no farther—from hence they had taken the reverse direction. The narrow pathway overhung the precipice. He clung to the nearest tree, for a feeling of fear, hitherto absolutely unknown to him, oppressed him as he gazed downwards into a deep thicket of gorse and ferns, which clothed the interstices between the rocks.

It was wild and beautiful at all times, and now the dark shadows, caused by the setting sun across the narrow gorge, enhanced its picturesque and almost solemn grandeur.

Dalrymple stood for a moment, scarcely

daring to penetrate the gradually increasing gloom. But soon he was riveted to the spot by the fascination of terror—his eyeballs dilated—his whole frame trembled like an aspen-leaf—large cold drops stood upon his forehead. Before him lay Percival, his figure half concealed, but on his pale, up-turned face one ray shone from the setting sun, lighting up his features, as if in mockery of the dead. It was all over. The eye was fixed—the pulse had ceased to beat. He was quite dead!

A few terrible seconds, and Dalrymple was at his side. All spoke for itself. The horse, terrified at the noise, and the sight of the rolling rock, had started, plunged, and thrown his rider—death had been instantaneous. It was an awful sudden death, in an unprepared, an unguarded moment.

No one can stand by the dying bed of the

most humble Christian and not feel a holy awe, as the shadows of life's evening are gathering around—but a death such as Percival's is a sight to appal the hardest hearted. Dalrymple stood alone facing the dead—he, the reckless and unprincipled, who had made the end sanctify the means—who, once his early friend, had not shrunk from supplanting him in the affection of the woman he loved, who had later in life added to his sin, and robbed another of his inheritance—he was now lying before him. At such a time feeling is but an exaggeration of reality, obliterating all anger and resentment, smoothing away all injury, turning all bitterness into prayerful and pitying forgiveness.

It was with a feeling of relief that Dalrymple observed the figures of two men, standing in the pathway above, he beckoned them to come

down to him, for solitude amidst such a scene was awful. In a short time the terrible news had spread around, and further assistance being procured, the late possessor of Linstead was carried to that home he had so unjustly earned, and so speedily forfeited. And forfeited to whom? To the very man, who, by the apparent direct interposition of an overruling Providence, was destined still to inherit the home of his ancestors. If, as it was imagined, Percival left no will, Charles Seymour was heir at law in case the former died without children. Part of the unfortunate man's early life was certainly known to Dalrymple, but what had befallen him subsequent to his marriage was still hidden from him, and also the fate of his once loved Mabel Stewart, for as it has been before remarked, on this subject he had never touched with Mrs Neville. Were it indeed

acknowledged that Charles Seymour was rightful heir, then Dalrymple determined that all private affairs should give way, he would speedily return to Paris, and seeking out Charles Seymour, offer him all the advice and assistance in his power.

The whole and full confession of his love for Mabel Neville must be delayed until his return—yet enough had passed between them for each to feel acquainted with the other's feelings. It was not in Dalrymple's nature to delay the performance of any duty he considered imperative; and his interest for young Seymour led him to wish that common report alone should not convey the intelligence of Percival's sudden death. Late in the evening of the following day he therefore bid adieu to Molverley en route for Hazelymph, whence he had some preparations to make before

starting for Paris. He there received the not unwelcome intelligence that Percival had not died without a will. It appeared that, anxious to atone after death for his conduct during life—he had left the greatest part of his property to Sir Charles Seymour, the remainder to his wife in case she should be living at the time of his decease. Thus was part of his early and secret history disclosed to the world.

CHAPTER VI.

"It is my youth, it is my bloom, it is my glad free heart,
That I cast away for thee—for thee all reckless as
thou art."

DALRYMPLE hastened to Paris. His first visit was to the hotel formerly occupied by Sir Charles Seymour. Not many weeks had passed, since he had left him a prey to the conflicting feelings of vexation and remorse. He knew nothing of his later history. On enquiry he found he had left the hotel in the Rue Rivoli, where another address was delivered to him. There he applied, again in vain, another clue was given. Neither wearied nor out of spirits, for the terrible news he had

to communicate was of the utmost importance to Seymour's prospects, intent upon fulfilling his important mission, he found himself at length seeking admittance at no other door than that of the magnificent and familiarly-called Hotel Jarvis. He sweetly rejoiced that Seymour had found in his extreme need a wealthy friend as he concluded, being thus delivered from the dangers of improvidence, and those still greater of reckless despair.

As the door was opened to him, he was struck with the air of quiet and gloom which hung around, so opposed to both outward and interior grandeur.

He enquired for Sir Charles Seymour—did he reside here.

The answer was in the affirmative.

Though late in the day, could he see him on pressing business?

"No, at the moment Sir Charles was most fully engaged. Mr Jarvis was seriously ill, Sir Charles was in constant attendance."

"But for one moment," urged Mr Dalrymple, as he followed the English footman into the splendidly-furnished room, already described, and which, from its cold and stately appearance, bore evident marks of not having been inhabited of late.

"Indeed, Sir," replied the man, it is impossible you can see Sir Charles just at present, or Mrs Cecil either; but if you will please to wait a short time, I think Sir Charles will be able to attend to you—my master, I fear, is dying."

It was strange—there was evidently something mysterious going on. If, indeed, the old man were ill, dying, his visit was ill-timed, yet he determined to carry his point, and,

excusing himself for his importunity, begged that his request might be conveyed to Sir Charles as soon as it was possible.

In the mean time his thoughts were not on the whole unpleasant, so much had occurred within the last few days, tending to show the shortness and uncertainty of life, yet his own bright hopes had a magic in them to dispel the sad memories connected with his renewal of Percival's acquaintance, and the shock his awful death occasioned even to his strong nervous system; Seymour's prospects had marvellously brightened, all *he* had once so fervently desired might now be brought about, and happiness would probably bring that discretion and carefulness which his late trials had apparently not been able to produce. Time was flying, half-an-hour had passed,—a

full hour, yet Seymour did not appear. He had not sent up his name, should he venture to do so?

But what if Dalrymple could in person have carried on the investigation his thoughts were making into the cause of Seymour's lengthened absence,—what if he could have pierced the walls that separated them, and have seen him the principal actor in the scene that tended at once to overthrow all the hopes he had been so fondly indulging!

Seymour was kneeling by the side of the old man who had befriended and received him when he had first encountered the world's frowns, when friendship, and love, and hope, and joy, with fortune's bright gifts, seemed lost to him for ever. Seymour was kneeling by

the bed side of old Mr Jarvis, who was fast sinking into life's repose, but whose eyes kindled with all the brightness of former days as they were bent upon the scene before him. It was a marriage ceremonial. Close to him, on one side of Seymour, knelt his darling Rosa, his adopted child ; before them stood the minister, who was performing the sacred ceremony. And Rosa's mother was present. It was she who had encircled her brow with the bridal wreath, and placed over her the long drooping veil to hide her burning blushes and her tears, for while the last wish of her innocent heart was being fulfilled, while rejoicing that Charles Seymour would really call her wife, she knew that she was about to lose her youth's early friend, he who had stood in a father's stead, whom as a father she had always considered. He, whose last act was

intended to secure her happiness, she felt would not live to witness it. But she had been clasped to a mother's heart, she had received a parent's blessing, the dream of her early childhood and of youth had been fulfilled. Gratitude for such a blessing mingled with the reverence with which she listened to the words which bound her for ever to Charles Seymour.

The short but important ceremony was concluded—the old man's strength had been taxed to the uppermost. Having blessed and feebly joined the hands of the newly-married pair, he sank back exhausted, and soon fell into a quiet, child-like sleep, leaving Rosa and Seymour still watching breathlessly the ebb of the good old man's life. Mrs Cecil was retiring to her own room for a few minutes, to seek in prayer the strength she needed,

when, at length, Mr Dalrymple's message was delivered to her. Mechanically following the servant, who said that the gentleman on urgent business was awaiting her presence in the saloon, she concluded that the interview would at least be a short one, and expecting to see one of the notaries who had been drawing up the marriage settlement, she advanced towards the centre of the room. The door closed upon her. A figure started up from the opposite sofa, a bright lamp lit up the well-known, never-to-be-forgotten features—she stood face to face with Herbert Dalrymple!

Time, it is true, had stamped itself, with its unfailing impress, upon these two beings, who, after years of sorrow, of absence, of strong, passionate feeling, had thus once more strangely met. Both were changed.

Powerful, upright, full of life's vigour—

energy, intellect, and decision marked *his* manly countenance, and firmly-developed figure. Dalrymple was but the expanded ideal of his youth's early promise, while *she*, pale, worn, bearing on her face unmistakeable evidence of deep suffering, had exchanged the beautiful bloom of happy girlhood for the woman's sad experience and self-dependence.

"Is your business very important, sir?" she had begun, "Sir Charles Seymour is at present—" She stopped. Before she finished speaking, a memory flashed upon her—it became reality. She stood immoveable. "You are Herbert Dalrymple!" Her trembling limbs did not fail her, she stood looking at him, as if she would read the whole history of years in that one long, earnest gaze. She had power over herself to subdue the excess of her emotion. He had sank into the nearest

chair. The movement of her tall, graceful figure, as she first entered the room, the tones of her voice, serious, sad, yet decided, as of old, then so low, soft, and mournful, woke those powerful echoes that long had slept within his heart.

“After such long, long years, we are both changed, Mabel Stewart!”

“And years have passed since I have heard that word pronounced,” she said; “and it now brings back very vivid recollections both of happiness and misery, but all is long past and forgiven—all should be forgotten.”

“The wronged may speak of forgiveness!”

The bitter recollections that forced themselves upon him melted into pity, as he strained his eyes upon the altered, but still beautiful,

woman who stood before him. He rose, and taking her hand, led her to a seat.

This trivial act of kindness seemed to break the bonds of pride and coldness, which had kept them apart. His eye still wandered over her pale face, and the figure still possessing the outline of former beauty. How strange was the fate which had thus brought him in contact with her, forcing him to be the bearer of tidings he shrunk from revealing. But he nerved himself to fulfil his mission. He knew her to be of strong, undaunted spirit. After a short preamble, he told her of Percival's death.

She had long thought of herself as widowed, lonely, forsaken; she fancied her husband had perished at sea, though at the same time she was conscious that his was not a nature to

seek for a renewal of their short-lived domestic happiness, she knew that his passionate admiration for her had soon exhausted itself, and that wealth was the real idol to which his reckless and restless mind had bowed itself. Since he had quitted her in Italy, she had lost all traces of his very existence.

She did not, during Dalrymple's short but terrible recital, lose her self-possession, though her cheek became of death-like paleness. When he had finished speaking, she entreated him not to leave her. She had need of friendly counsel and support.

But the truth was not all told—Sir Charles Seymour's name, mentioned accidentally, was a clue to further disclosures. All the fortune her husband had inherited in her right was left to her, but Linstead reverted to Sir Charles Seymour. Then came the short recital

of the principal incidents in Mrs Cecil's own eventful life. Dalrymple listened at first calmly, even to the revelations which convinced him that Percival in the early part of his career had acted the traitor's part towards himself, accusing him falsely of coldness and neglect, misrepresenting his conduct while far away and incapable of self-defence, and ending by insinuating himself into the affections of the woman whom he had confided to his trusted friendship. To all this Dalrymple listened with comparative calmness. Years had passed away, all was changed, a terrible justice had been awarded him,—life, too, had begun to wear once more a happy aspect for him; but when Mrs Cecil represented that Seymour had sealed his own destiny, that his marriage, yes, his legal marriage, had just been solemnized, when, possessing a clue to his late history, he

instantly discovered to what extremities his necessities had reduced him, grief and indignation completely overpowered him. He could not give vent to his feelings, or inform Mrs Cecil that the marriage which had been just concluded, was but a marriage of necessity on Seymour's part. So utterly was the young man degraded in his eyes, that he would have left the house without having an interview with him, had not Mrs Cecil entreated him to be the bearer of all the important news with which in friendship he had charged himself for him. If possible, the episode in Eleanor Neville's life must never be made known, for the cup of humiliation was already overflowing.

In a few minutes Mrs Cecil had left the room, and Seymour appeared.

Dalrymple's countenance expressed, as might

be supposed, the most terrible severity. Seymour put out his hand. He held Dalrymple in the highest esteem, yet would he rather have seen any one at the present moment than him ; how could he approve of or congratulate him upon the hasty marriage he had just concluded ?— he in whom he had confided with regard to Eleanor, who was a man of the strictest principles of integrity. All his former gaiety and frank, thoughtless manner had vanished. He looked ten years older than when Dalrymple had last parted from him, so great had been his inward struggles between feeling and necessity !

“I should have avoided this meeting, Sir, had I not important news to communicate— perhaps you are not aware, that you have for ever lowered yourself in the eyes of all true men. Do you know that I had hoped you might have

overcome every obstacle, and have been in the position to marry Eleanor Neville?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Seymour, as he strove to avoid Dalrymple's scornful look of displeasure. "But do not name her—you do not know what I have had to contend with—her name still arouses feelings that should now be for ever silenced."

"Feelings!" said Dalrymple, still more scornfully—"do not trifle with so sacred a word. But your faults and follies are but too surely punished."

"Do be less enigmatical, if you wish me to understand you," exclaimed Seymour, irritated beyond measure by Dalrymple's reproachful words.—"What redress had I—what friend to whom I could apply? Was I not scorned, deserted by those who had made me the

penniless wretch I was. Did not her father forbid our union—was I to bear all tamely, and die an outcast and a beggar?”

“ If you had used lawful means, and trusted to the all-wise Disposer of Events,” said Dalrymple, seriously, and reverently, “ all would have been well.—I have cared for you, thought of, prayed for you as my own brother—now you must abide by your own determination.”

“ There was but one being, yourself excepted,” said the young man, whose better feelings could not be long silenced, “ who stood by me in extreme adversity—who opened his house to me—who showered benefits upon me ; who but asked in return that I should protect his fatherless adopted child, and give her some portion, at least, of the affection with

which I had unintentionally inspired her. I have given her all that was in my power to give."

"And, with the memory of another still vividly fresh, as you would have me believe—you have thus added wrong to wrong. I would have had you leave all to be true and constant.

"And you know, had a shadow of hope been allowed me, I should have been faithful to the last—but why all this unnecessary torture?"

"You well say, this torture is now unnecessary, for you do not know all. You remember Mr Percival?"

"What cruel mockery of my poverty and misery. This is not kind [or charitable, Dalrymple."

"Mr Percival has died suddenly—the par-

ticulars of his death are too horrible to relate at present—suffice it to say, that your position is totally reversed, you are no longer poor, you are affluent—you have the means of gratifying every wish, for Percival has left you his heir. Yes—Linstead, your favourite Linstead, is yours. It was in your power to begin a new life. I need not say how your mercenary marriage has marred every prospect.” Seymour was speechless—he looked at Dalrymple as if he would read his inmost thoughts.

“Yes !” the latter continued, with unrelenting severity, “you have now a home to which you can conduct your bride—you will not be indebted to her alone for means of subsistence.”

“Oh ! have you no pity on me !” exclaimed Seymour, as he wrung his hands in bitter agony.

“Have you merited pity? you have sought and have won the hand of a wealthy heiress—surely you are rather an object of envy. You have only to forget—we can no longer reason upon woman’s fickleness. But I am wrong—I am misled by mistaken zeal and passion. Your bride of an hour has now every claim upon you. You have promised to protect and cherish, love and honour her. I believe my mission is concluded. You have no words of farewell to Eleanor Neville?”

“I can bear all—your scorn, your detestation—all but my own remorseful misery. To say I love Rosa is a mockery. I have never loved but one—to her I say farewell for ever—to life, to happiness, to all that this world can give. I am grown old, tell her, in sorrow and vain regrets. I can forget all but her—even now. You might have had pity on

me—have been less harsh and unfeeling : but I forgive.” He rushed out of the room. Dalrymple remained for some few moments deep in thought. Just indignation had prompted his severe condemnation of Seymour’s conduct ; yet he sincerely pitied the unhappy youth on whom fortune, even while she openly smiled, had frowned in secret. Yet his fate was not to be blindly blamed. No one had started in life with fairer prospects than Charles Seymour ; no one had been more beloved, or possessed more enviable qualities ; no one had been more idolized than he had been by the uncle, whose affection had been exceeded by his justice. But all was at an end. Poor Eleanor Neville !

Dalrymple was prepared to leave Paris again in a few days, and purposely abstained during his short visit from having further direct

communication with any member of the Hotel Jarvis, with whom vain but painful regrets were connected.

That he had embittered the first days of Seymour's married life he was well aware; that his disclosures had revived his scarcely-slumbering affection for Eleanor Neville he also knew; but he was certainly not prepared for all that followed quickly upon these disclosures. A letter was brought to him on the morning that he intended leaving Paris, in a well-known hand-writing, entreating his presence, and advice, on a momentous occasion. He obeyed the summons, not without a pre-sentiment of evil. Old Mr Jarvis had died the preceding week: the windows were closed, and the house naturally presented a cheerless appearance, although within the very walls a marriage, usually so joyous a ceremony, had

so lately been solemnised. Though mourning was within, surely joy ought to have tempered grief; the old had passed away, he had run his race; but with the young, bright promises were yet to be fulfilled.

Yet, as Dalrymple entered the doors, his heart misgave him that some blight had fallen upon the fair young bride, or Mrs Cecil's summons would not have been so hasty and so pressing. Beautiful Rosa! who had hitherto unknowingly been watched over through life by a mother's care; who, in the midst of the sorrow with which she mourned the loss of the kindest of protectors, had rejoiced in the fulfilment of the only hopes she had ever cherished; she was a mourning, though not a widowed bride.

All too surely and too deeply had Dalrymple's representations, his scorn and

ungovernable indignation, awoke Seymour's strong feelings of self-condemnation for the weak and sinful part he had played, while the last change of fortune, putting him on a level with the wealthy of the land, had only served to alienate his affections still more from one whom he had vowed to cherish and protect through life. All was yet too keen and fresh for him to be able to sun himself in the warmth of her guileless affection. Already his pre-occupied manner and settled expression of gloomy thought had, he well knew, asked for an explanation it was impossible for him to give, while he was maddened with the consciousness that his hastily contracted marriage could but be regarded by Eleanor Neville as the proof of a fickleness of which he wished he could really believe himself guilty.

No ! All had conspired against him to prove what metal he was of. He had been weighed in the balance of adversity, and been found wanting.

Under these terrible convictions, Rosa's affection was more than distressing to him, nor could he stand her mother's deep and searching glance. Some step must be taken to restore him in any degree to equanimity of mind. He trusted all to time—it had, he knew, a healing influence—but the quiet, the monotony of a stationary home was become perfectly unbearable. A temporary absence and perfect change of scene was, he felt, the best resource to which he could apply.

A quickly-concocted plan, a plausible story of a hasty summons from a friend, who, fancying himself dying, and in a foreign land, had entreated Seymour to make all speed to receive his

last wishes, sufficed to give a colour of excuse for his sudden departure for the East, which for some days he had been meditating. Thus does one unwary step lead on to another, and another, and he who seeks by unlawful or unprincipled means to extricate himself from difficulty, does but sink deeper and deeper into disgrace and misery. On the morning on which Dalrymple had hastened, to answer Mrs Cecil's summons, Seymour quitted Paris, having left a few lines concerning his future plans, kindly worded, but piercing through the heart of the unfortunate Rosa.

Seymour had purposely avoided saying farewell. He spoke of his intended return, at no very distant period, when he hoped it would be in his power to fulfil the promises he had made to Mr Jarvis. He

trusted his young wife, in the meantime, to her mother's tender care.

Such was the dark and terrible mystery upon which Mrs Cecil craved Dalrymple's friendly counsel, for with Seymour's altered manner and sudden disappearance some mystery was connected, to which Rosa's former misgivings and forebodings gave a miserable strength.

She was sure that she had not sufficed, she never could suffice to him, as wife. Gratitude, perhaps compassion, had prompted to the irrevocable step he had taken—or was it possible that her large fortune had attracted him? No! shame on the mercenary idea. Yet she was his own lawful wife; why had he thus deserted her in the first days of their married life? Would she not willingly have accompanied him on the merciful mission

he told her he was fulfilling? Had she not a right to go with him all over the world? Her mother vainly endeavoured to console her, but there was no source from which to draw consolation.

It was a relief when Mr Dalrymple made his appearance. Dressed in the deepest mourning, Rosa's mother met him, as he was mounting the stairs. She told him in a few words what had occurred since their last meeting, and, opening the door of Rosa's sitting-room, invited him to follow.

Rosa's own taste had ornamented this room, and its elegant and brilliant aspect presented a sad contrast to her own mournful appearance, as she sat perfectly immoveable, as if despair had deprived her of life.

As her mother and Dalrymple entered, she raised her head. All her soft, girlish

beauty had vanished ; her heavy eyes wandered mechanically towards Dalrymple, while a faint blush tinged her pale cheek.

For the moment Dalrymple seemed to lose his self-command. What counsel could he give ? None ! He could only break out into the most bitter invectives against Seymour, who seemed to live but to bring misery upon all connected with him.

To follow in his track was apparently hopeless—he had left no direct address. He could but entreat Rosa to be calm, reasonable ; for her mother's sake, not to give way to despair.

As his best friend, one of whom Seymour had often spoken in the most affectionate terms, she entreated him to tell her if possible all he knew of his former history. If he would only return, even if he had loved another,

she might, perhaps, hope to win him to herself by the submission and tenderness of the most devoted wife.

Endeavouring, as much as possible, to evade her questions, and promising to remain some few days longer in Paris, or even, if possible, to discover the route he had taken, Dalrymple took a hasty leave. He feared to yield up the secret, which should be carefully preserved, to Rosa's pressing investigations. On returning to his own apartments, he found a letter from Seymour, informing him of the step he had taken, and desiring him, if he wished to have any communication with him, to address him at Alexandria, from whence the letter would be forwarded to him.

If such were his destination, there might be still time to overtake him before he quitted Marseilles, whence the steamer was to sail

early the following week. That very night Dalrymple determined to start for that port, once more to use the influence he knew he possessed over him, for the purpose of persuading him not to add folly to folly, crime to crime, but calmly to take upon himself the fulfilment of the duties for which he had become responsible.

But this plan was frustrated. The same evening another message reached him from Mrs Cecil. Rosa's state made her very anxious. The sudden shock she had received, by which her fondest hopes were overthrown, added to the depression of mind caused by Seymour's altered manner ever since her marriage, was certainly tending to produce an attack of fever, from which great danger might be apprehended. In this great distress Mrs Cecil, waiving conventionalism, had entreated Dalrymple again to come to her assistance.

During the whole of the day Rosa had refused to listen to any words of attempted consolation, or to take the smallest nourishment. Her mother had urged, entreated, but in vain. Still she lay on the sofa in her own sitting-room; there she had last parted from her husband—his few cruel words were still held crushed in her hand, which burnt as Dalrymple kindly pressed it in his own. The wildness of fever was in her eyes, her cheek was flushed, her hair hung in disorder, while a few buds of the orange-flower wreath she had worn at the bridal ceremony were beside her, vain relics of a short-lived happiness, and at which she gazed with mournful pleasure.

While they watched beside her, silently, she fell into a heavy dreamless sleep—all the past events of life for the moment sinking into insignificance, with those two strangely-linked

beings, who were now buried in the reality of the present. It seemed hard that one so young and innocent should be doomed to the intense suffering, to endure which time and experience in general kindly pave the way.

Dalrymple spoke of his intended pursuit of Seymour—it received Mrs Cecil's sanction—but at the same time she entreated him to delay his journey for a few days, trusting her anxiety on Rosa's account would ere then have passed away, enabling her to cope alone with the difficulties that lay before her. Widowed and solitary, having lost the kindest of friends and benefactors, she felt she had now a home to seek. Brighter days were, she trusted, in store for her child; yet, should the illness which threatened her pass away, she trusted it might ever be permitted her to watch over

her, either to witness her happiness or soothe her sorrow. Then she confided to Dalrymple the yearning she had towards her native country. To be once more on English ground and welcomed to a sister's embrace, had been the silent dream of many suffering years—might it not now be realised?

Too long and bitterly had she paid the penalty of early error, in no way more severely than in the total banishment from her own family. Her youth and its aspirations had passed away; while Dalrymple still cherished hopes he could not confide to her, with whom the kind freedom of friendship had for ever superseded more arbitrary ties. His thoughts reverted to Mabel Neville, with a fondness to which he was resolved his next meeting should give full expression; and whether his search proved successful or no, he determined

that his steps should speedily' be turned homewards.

It was also agreed, that when Rosa was sufficiently recovered, she and her mother should visit England, taking up their temporary abode in a small house belonging to the Hazelymph estate, not far from the Glen.

While they thus spoke of the past and the future, Rosa still slept, but it was evidently a feverish and not a refreshing sleep. It was certainly advisable to procure medical advice, in this early stage of illness, to ward off the chance of worse symptoms than had at present shown themselves, though Mrs Cecil naturally shrunk from disclosing to a stranger, that severe mental anxiety in one so young had so strongly acted upon her bodily frame.

Dalrymple at length took his leave, content to think that Rosa was placed in good hands,

under the charge of the eminent Dr ———, and that he had done all in his power to smoothe the difficulties that lay in her mother's path.

Day after day, however, passed, and his friendship was called into constant exercise; he had not the heart to leave Mrs Cecil to bear alone the burden of the most wearing anxiety, for Rosa's indisposition had soon taken an alarming form. There was a struggle between life and death—but youth, more than strength of constitution, at length overcame the violence of disease, and the fever subsided, but to leave a languor and delicacy, to guard against which, the utmost care was necessary. But it was now high time for Dalrymple to start upon his meditated travels, for consciousness had fully returned to the poor invalid—it was all like a terrible dream to

her. Could he but succeed in his endeavours, and induce Seymour to return with him, his presence would, above all, tend to invigorate Rosa's health, and re-establish peace in her heart. In the mean time Mrs Cecil was fully bent upon the projected visit to England, persuading herself that the change of air and scene, and the gratifying Rosa's earnest wishes to become acquainted with her mother's own native land, would soon do wonders in infusing new strength into her constitution.

Dalrymple soon set off upon his travels, leaving the mother and daughter to make every necessary preparation for their visit to England.

CHAPTER VII.

“But did'st thou meet the face no more
Which thy young heart first knew?
And all—was all in this world o'er
With ties thus close and true?”

DAYS had lengthened into weeks since Dalrymple's departure from Molverley, and Mabel Neville had received no tidings of him. Not, as she thought herself, that she had any right to expect a communication direct from him, for no word had passed his lips, binding her when absent to cherish his remembrance. Certainly he had been instrumental in saving her life, and perhaps, at such a time, he might have been betrayed into an expression

of more than common feeling, yet their short last parting was ever recurring to mind, when he seemed for a moment to feel privileged to pass the ordinary bounds of conventional civility.

Still why had he not written? His journey to Paris was fraught with mutual interest.

He had not the courage to disclose all, nor if he wrote could he disguise the truth. Time would prove all things.

Meanwhile, Mabel had no friend at hand to whom she could open her heart. Florence's reserve was painful to her; mourning in secret over the loss of her youth's friend, she had at length learnt even to shun her society, and now her heart began to yearn for her own home. Having recovered from her accident, she determined, notwithstanding

the old Earl's entreaties, to leave Molverley at once.

The longing to see once more all the loved home faces became irresistible, and with mingled feelings of regret and pleasure she bade adieu to Molverley and its inmates.

She had certainly gained experience in the world's ways, and had learnt to discriminate between the kindness of true benevolence, and the counterfeit interest of etiquette. She had also learnt the hard lesson, that on untried friendship the stamp of worth has not been set. She had learnt it to her cost; she bitterly mourned over this hard knowledge, as she bid Lady Florence adieu, with an outward composure, of which, but some short months previous, she could not have imagined herself capable. At length the parting was over, and Mabel felt she had grown

worldly, selfish, unkind ! But intuitively she knew that deep in Florence's heart rankled proud disappointment ; it would have been a mockery to attempt the expression of feelings belonging to that which has " passed away."

Sad thought, that the past can never return ! Hopes crushed, opportunities of doing good, gone for ever, will cause a gleam of thought to pass across the mind of the least reflective.

How venerable is the past ! how the enthusiastic, loving heart, clings to its memory ! Adieu, picturesque, beautiful, beloved relics of what was once young, bright, and aspiring as childhood's self ! how comparatively tame and uninteresting, is the bright, broad, unmarked expanse of what is stretched out before us at the present hour ! Who does not

love the very lichen on the old grey stone, because it speaks of the past! the leafless branch of the hollow gnarled oak, which could preach to the understanding soul, the wisdom of centuries!

Yet the present, the fickle fashion of the hour, glories in its innumerable votaries.

It was New Year's Day, and Mabel was travelling homewards.

The new year! How all our anticipations turn towards it! The old is dismissed, disregarded as having fulfilled its mission, and is thrown aside for ever. It can give us nothing more.

The young heir apparent of time's inestimable wealth has taken possession, and craves our care and homage.

We yield it, unquestioning.

But that past irrecoverable 'old year' knows

its own worth, though we are blind to it. It cannot be folded up and put away as a worn-out garment, nor kindly tolerated, only in consideration of former services, like some worn-out old statesman or general. Clad in its mantle of snow, it vanishes away, but its frozen footsteps leave an indelible impress upon the springing turf of the young green year. We bear the stamp of the past in our present existence. It speaks in our looks, words, actions ; we are not moulded suddenly into the form we now possess. And when alone, unnumbered memories and thoughts, sad, bright, changing like the swift summer clouds, fleet over us, bringing back to our minds hours, perhaps the sweetest hours in our life, passed away for ever. Sometimes the tide of thought that rushes in is too painful to be borne, contrasted with the present moment. We would force

it back again; it unfits us too much for the small, wearisome, yet content-giving duties of actual life. In fancy we see again the kind face, hear the gentle, loving voice, feel the warm pressure of the hand, on all of which death, or change, has set his seal; and the heart, while it yearns in agony towards the visionary past, feels too acutely the resistance of those prison bars, through which young happiness, hope, and love, never more can enter.

Solitude has indeed a strange power over us; particularly solitude in a home crowded with the recollections of a thoughtful, if not an eventful life.

But to Mabel Neville all was joy,—real, and in anticipation—when she found herself, once more, the welcomed wanderer, reunited to the home circle. And changes had taken

place, even during the few months of her absence. Eleanor was changed to her eyes, as she sat by the bright winter's fire, which, lighting up the pure beauty of her countenance, revealed an expression of subdued feeling, and resigned melancholy, which Mabel contemplated with pain, though not without deep admiration. Their mother, too, at times wore a more anxious look than usual; though she was ever cheerful and kind, yet every now and then she seemed to have gained a habit of looking as if she were endeavouring to read Eleanor's thoughts—while Mabel longed to confide to her sister the hopes that she had never yet expressed to any human being, did she not fear to awake her bitter regrets.

But the greatest change was in Mr Neville. He was no longer the stern, reserved, silent being, whom his children feared and revered,

but could scarcely be said to love with filial affection. The child whose happiness had received so severe a blow, whose union with one whom he considered unworthy of her he had thought it his duty to forbid, now appeared to have aroused at length that dormant feeling of parental love, which is blessed both in the giver and the receiver. To all around, but to Eleanor in particular, he was become gentle and sympathizing, seeming as if he thus wished to atone for all he had been unwillingly compelled to make his child suffer. And thus it might be truly said that the severing of one strong tie, had but drawn closer around Eleanor others of a no less exalted character; while Mabel, in her thorough appreciation of the increased delights of home, almost blessed the firmness, for which her father felt such an

atonement necessary as that which he had learnt to practise.

Eleanor, too, felt the force of that strong principle of right, which required that its stern dictates should be qualified by the subduing of what had become second nature,—yet loving as she did to feel that she had awakened her father's latent sympathies, she could not forget. She knew that Seymour could never be more to her; his present life, his abode, his future prospects, his destination, were all unknown to her. She felt it her duty to forget him in time, for a miracle was not to be worked for her. She could not unreservedly blame him, as most did. Fortune had been his enemy—he had but to choose between evils.

She did not know all. Report said he was Mr Percival's heir. If such were the case,

might not happier days be in store ; might not wealth be his to share with her, if only her father's stern rejection of him in his altered circumstances had not aroused the pride which even he, gentle as he was, possessed.

Might she not still hope?

Such hope it was now Mabel's earnest endeavour tacitly to encourage, through the medium (though she scarcely admitted the idea to dwell in her mind) of Mr Dalrymple's power to produce order out of disorder, and to bring happiness out of trouble.

For Mabel saw everything through the bright medium of her own mind. To her the world was a pleasant and beautiful place, replete with blessings, great and small, both within and around us, where opportunities are ever opening before us for doing good, and obtaining good, if only we give heed to

them. So many light hearts and happy faces are to be seen! A kind look and word can so easily alleviate sorrow, and earnest endeavours will so surely succeed in bestowing more substantial, though not more lasting, benefits than smiles and words, that mere existence may well be considered as a boon for which we cannot be sufficiently grateful. Mabel felt it to be a pleasant world, because, to a pure and earnest heart, such as hers, opportunities will never fail for the expansion of kindly feeling; and to her it was also a beautiful world, varying in its aspect of sunshine and shade, mountains and vallies, and forests. And well may each grateful heart pronounce it to be a beautiful world, with its warm and sunny climes, its ice-bound, grand, and barren coasts, its tropical luxuriance of vegetation, its calm hill sides, on

which, in this our temperate zone, the rising and setting sun throws its lengthened advancing and departing shadows. How grand is the stormy ocean, stretching from land to land! how peaceful the pretty stream which waters the green meadows of our childhood's home—everywhere, what beauty, what simplicity, and sublimity!

Mabel rather rejoiced to find that the possessor of Hazelymph, on whose grey wall she gazed rather more frequently than formerly, was still absent. Absence gave a colour to the silence which, as she confessed, she was very impatient should no longer be unbroken; yet she could not believe the report in circulation, which said that Mr Dalrymple, tired of the solitude of his own home, on quitting Paris, had set off on travels which were to be of some months' duration, and in

the meantime had ordered the White Cottage to be prepared for the reception of a lady and her daughter, to whom, being in difficulties, he had offered a temporary home.

But this report was not unfounded, on the whole. The White Cottage appeared exactly suited to the position in which Mrs Cecil and her daughter were for the time so unfortunately placed, being on the borders of the New Forest, within a comparatively easy distance from the sea coast; and, above all, near the one spot towards which Mrs Cecil's recollections of youth fondly leant. Its unpretending exterior, as well as its cheerful sunny aspect, rendered it a well-chosen abode, when retirement, as well as restoration to health, was an object. Both Mrs Cecil and Rosa preferred remaining incognito until Mr Dalrymple's return, when happier days might be looked

for, and Rosa's marriage even was purposely kept a secret, in order not to awaken neighbouring curiosity for the fate of one apparently so deserted. Both anxiously looked forward to Mr Dalrymple's return, as they first established themselves in their new abode, while Mrs Cecil assumed a cheerfulness she could not feel, for Rosa's health was still extremely delicate, and her spirits very variable.

At times she would give way to the most joyous expectations of her husband's speedy return, and satisfactory explanation of all she dwelt upon so uneasily, connected with his real feelings towards herself; then she would suddenly sink into the deepest despair, and, throwing herself into her mother's arms, sob as if her heart would break. At length, a profound melancholy seemed to be her settled

state of mind. She wished for no society, or any change to divert her thoughts, her principal delight consisting in wandering with her mother amid the beautiful glades of the forest.

Longing as she did to behold her sister once more, Mrs Cecil, after some days spent in this retirement, waited a fitting opportunity to visit the Glen, hoping each day that Rosa would begin to benefit by the complete change of place and scene. At length accident brought about an unexpected meeting.

It was the last week in January. A delightfully soft warm day for the season tempted Rosa to wish to explore further than usual, and, feeling fatigued, she sat down under a sunny bank, while her mother carefully wrapt her shawl around her, to shield her from the least breath of cold air.

While thus busily engaged, neither mother nor daughter perceived, that two female figures had approached, and were standing at a little distance, looking on, with an interest which was perhaps more benevolent than courteous, but Rosa's extreme delicacy of complexion and figure were too remarkable not to attract the attention of all who happened to pass by during her's and Mrs Cecil's daily walks; and now, with a few words of apology, Eleanor and Mabel Neville (for it was they) came up, and begged to know if they could render any assistance.

In a moment, a conviction flashed across Mrs Cecil's mind, that it was her sister's own children with whom she was standing talking face to face.

The temptation to make herself known to them was almost irresistible, but she restrained

herself, inviting them to accompany her and Rosa to the cottage, and rest before returning to the Glen, which, as they said, was a distance of three miles.

It happened that the two sisters had started from home, with the intention of making their first call upon their new neighbours at the White Cottage, about whom report had circulated many interesting and improbable anecdotes, and they were not sorry to identify them with the pretty invalid Rosa, and the handsome and fascinating-mannered Mrs Cecil.

The latter was not at a loss to account for a certain sympathy which both parties felt attracted them at once towards each other.

The romance in Mabel's enthusiastic nature was pleasantly excited by the mystery

which she determined to think was connected with the history of her new friends, their sudden change to the retirement of the New Forest, from the gaiety of Paris. Rosa's extreme youth, contrasted with her evident dejection, the air of wealth and refinement which was visible around. At the same time Eleanor's gentleness and unobtrusive feeling, joined to her personal beauty, was most attractive to her unknown cousin. She appeared to Rosa as the type of English maidenhood, the living personification of that high-souled loveliness, which her youthful imagination had so often pictured to itself, and which Seymour's glowing descriptions in the first happy days of her acquaintance with him had tended to idealize still more strongly.

And suddenly, as Eleanor sat by her (for

she was reclining on the sofa on which her mother's care had placed her when they reached home), then flashed across her memory the recollection of the name of Neville casually mentioned by him. It was, however, only a vague idea, which soon gave place to others more definite, as she listened to Eleanor's account of some particular spot in the neighbourhood of the Glen. It had often been painted to her in bright colours, during those first days when her sketches formed a fertile theme of conversation between herself and the young Englishman.

He was certainly acquainted with her beautiful cousins.

How was it, that he had never talked to her openly of them?

She longed, yet she dared not mention his name. No! It could never, she felt, pass her

lips, until happier days were in prospect—but were such ever reserved for her?

In the mean time she anxiously hoped, that her mother would give her permission to make herself known to the Nevilles at their next meeting, which was arranged for the following day, when Mrs Neville also intended calling.

The two girls at length hastened homewards to give a highly-coloured description of the two charming foreigners, as they were called, who had so unexpectedly arrived amongst them.

That evening was passed by mother and daughter in an unusual reverie, even though Rosa's invalid state had at present imposed quiet and early habits.

Mrs Cecil was recalling her nieces' features, from whom, as children, she had parted on

that eventful night, so many years ago. Then her dearly-loved sister, whose affectionate kindness she had so ungratefully outraged—how would she receive her on the morrow? Might she hope that—unchanged in heart, at least—she would once more be kind, loving, forgiving, as formerly. Surely sorrow has a right to sympathy—and she had suffered. And as she looked at Rosa, she felt, if only that blessing were spared her, she could bear all—even cold rejection by her own flesh and blood. If Rosa were only spared to her!

A pang shot across her heart; a doubt, a misgiving, a consciousness that deeper and deeper sorrow was in store for her. How pale and wasted she looked, as she lay motionless upon the sofa in her deep mourning dress; the subdued light of a lamp falling upon her, illuminating her young spotless

brow—her dark eye-lashes resting upon her once rounded cheek, now strongly marking out its changed outline. She was scarcely sleeping, though her eyes were closed. Visionary forms were passing before her brain, all more or less taking the likeness of Charles Seymour and Eleanor Neville. How she longed to hear all, to have her doubts solved: there was no peace in her heart. The feeble body rendering the spirit more sensitive than ever! Rosa little knew that at that moment her mother was gazing upon her with a fear which unutterable maternal love alone engenders! Her altered appearance had never struck Mrs Cecil so forcibly as at the present moment; perhaps as she contrasted it with the blooming beauty of the Nevilles, whose features, from their strong resemblance to their mother's, seemed destined to haunt her.

Rosa soon retired to rest, but Mrs Cecil still sat for some hours pondering over the events of her own life, and losing herself in conjectures in regard to the future. If the air of Hampshire were found not to agree with Rosa, she would certainly speedily remove her elsewhere, though the opening prospect of delightful intercourse with the Nevilles, gave promise of so much pleasure.

The following day Rosa seemed rather to have rallied, appearing less languid than usual; and her mother was only too glad to assist her in arranging according to her own taste one of the small sitting-rooms which opened into each other, with drawings and books—which had not hitherto been unpacked—in order to do honour to the expected arrival of her aunt and cousins. When Rosa was inspired with any, even the most trivial

interest, she was only too thankful, and she anxiously looked forward to the most beneficial effects from the society of girls of Rosa's own age, who would perhaps encourage her in her favourite pursuits, and give a different tone to her thoughts.

While she was assisting Rosa, noting with delight a more animated expression of countenance than she had of late worn, Mrs Neville's carriage drove up to the door. In another moment the long-anticipated meeting would be over. Would her sister recognize her? or had years indeed changed her, and rendered her a complete alien from her home?

She rushed into the adjoining room, desiring the servant to show the Miss Nevilles into the one she was quitting. An earnest, searching look—a start—a cry of surprise—

and the sisters were locked in each other's arms! It was, indeed, a moment of joy and thanksgiving.

They would have remained for hours together, forgetful of all in the mutual exchange of the hopes and anxieties which, unexpressed, had to both been for years a heavy burden, had not Rosa claimed even now a large share in her mother's thoughts. Apart from her she could not long be happy. And now Mrs Neville looks fondly upon the poor child, while Mrs Cecil anxiously studies the expression of her sister's countenance, and reads there what she feels is the confirmation of her fears. But from this moment a new life was opening to Rosa, and if anything could have given a happier turn to her thoughts, it was the companionship of Eleanor Neville.

A day seldom passed without the cousins meeting, and often Eleanor even took her aunt's place by Rosa's side, while Mrs Cecil was induced to spend part of the morning at the Glen; for Eleanor had a talent for nursing, and Rosa was never tired of looking at her sweet face.

Some days had passed since their first introduction to each other, and Rosa, who declared she had taken a fancy to the White Cottage, and had promised for her mother's sake to exert all her powers to be cheerful and patient, was giving orders about the unpacking a box of French books which had just arrived, when Eleanor's well-known step was heard. She had purposely come over to beg that her aunt would allow her to spend the morning with Rosa, while she changed places with her at the Glen, where some friends of her mother's

had just arrived, and had set their hearts upon renewing their early acquaintance with Mrs Cecil. The latter rather unwillingly consented ; but Rosa always appeared happy in her cousin's society, and giving Eleanor a few directions, she agreed to the proposed plan.

And now between the cousins so many subjects of interest were to be discussed, that the hours fled with astonishing quickness.

Young as she was, Rosa had seen far more of the world than Eleanor, who was never tired of drawing forth all her powers of description of her own early years passed at Marseilles, where she had first learnt to love and dwell upon beauty and romance ; of her yearning towards a mother whom she had, as she fancied, never known ; of Paris, and her first introduction into society. All was pleasing and new to Eleanor, who, as she listened, wondered that

one so young should have thought and felt so deeply, and have reasoned upon so many subjects on which experience alone enlightens the ignorantly happy: for Rosa always described the happiness of her early life to have been all but unclouded, whether it were really a relief to her to dwell upon that childish past, or whether she had a sort of consciousness that the melancholy she strove to hide must naturally excite Eleanor's curiosity, and, therefore, endeavoured to give a different bias to her ideas respecting her.

Upon no subject relative to Seymour had she hitherto ever touched. They had been so busily engaged, talking and listening by turns, that the morning had very nearly worn away, and still the parcel of French books lay upon the table, to arrange which Rosa had intended asking her cousin's assistance.

“ I suppose you have gained some of your experience from these valuable sources ?” said Eleanor, laughing, as she began to unpack the books, and sought out places for them on the book-shelves. “ But, after all, I see they are mostly French novels—are they worth reading ?”

“ No, scarcely ; but anything is interesting to me, from a child’s story-book upwards. And I suppose the librarian knew my taste for romance, for we quitted Paris too hastily to select our own books.”

“ Ah, here is Monte Christo,” said Eleanor, as she took up one of the volumes ; “ and some excellent illustrations, too.”

She placed the book upon the table before Rosa. They turned over the leaves together.

“ This has evidently been a favourite with either artists or authors,” and Eleanor pointed

to some half-effaced marks in pencil on the margin of some of the leaves. "Ah, and here is a visiting-card of some grand Marquis, I suppose?" she read the words before she was aware—she had pronounced the name of Charles Seymour!

For one moment she stood riveted to the spot, as she looked at the well-known name. Then suddenly replaced the card in the book, and continued turning over the leaves.

She was so intent upon not compromising herself, or displaying any emotion before Rosa, that she did not see the countenance of the latter, nor the searching glance she gave her as she examined the card.

"You know Sir Charles Seymour?" said Rosa, faintly, as she still kept her eyes upon her companion. But Eleanor seemed again too engrossed in examining the illustrations

to take note of Rosa's question. Rosa repeated it: and now Eleanor had gained enough command over herself to reply with sufficient composure—

“ Yes ; I have known him very long, almost from childhood.”

“ And you have never mentioned his name to me ?”

“ No. I have not seen him for months. But why do you ask ?”

“ Not merely from curiosity — you must excuse me.”

“ Is he an acquaintance of yours ?” asked Eleanor. “ You may have met in Paris, perhaps ?”

She spoke as coldly and quietly as she could, though her heart beat violently, as she continued turning over leaf after leaf without examination. Her remarkable agitation, which it was impos-

sible to hide from the quick-sighted Rosa, was to the latter a convincing proof that some mystery existed. Oh! if she could only gain an insight into her husband's previous history.

She felt she had power over herself to preserve her own secret.

"Oh yes, he is, as you guess, an acquaintance of mine. Indeed, I think I was introduced to Sir Charles very soon after his arrival at Paris. I fancy he looked upon me then as a child. He was the first handsome Englishman I had seen, and he consequently made a great impression upon me. And now tell me all about him, Eleanor?" she continued, caressingly.

Oh, if either could have looked into the other's heart, what a history would there have been read! But Eleanor, deeply as she had schooled herself to be reconciled to her lot, dwelling upon

those parts of Seymour's character which she knew were faulty, had yet never lost her confidence in him. Though their engagement was outwardly broken off, it never entered her mind that she was forgotten, or that another could replace her. Yet why did Rosa question her so closely. She would willingly have warded off the investigation, and given some trivial answer, but already she felt certain, from the penetrating glance cast upon her, that half her secret at least was known.

“Now, Eleanor, do tell me all you know about my Parisian friend, Sir Charles? You know in that gay city he became rather a noted person. His uncle disinherited him,—my dear kind Mr Jarvis was as a father to him, for he lost all his property, did he not?”

“Yes, at one time, but I believe a wonderful

destiny has restored the old family estate to him."

"Do you not wonder why I am so persevering? but you are always kind, Eleanor, and must humour me a little more," said Rosa, in the tone of a spoilt child. "Indeed, I feel as if I had known you all my life. You will tell me, without thinking me too indiscreet, if I am right or wrong. Is your history, the history of your heart, Eleanor, at all connected with Sir Charles Seymour's? I am sure you are his *beau ideal*. I am sure he has often spoken to me of you!"

"The history of the heart," said Eleanor, sadly, "as you call it, is often a sad history. Why will you ask so many questions? I think I must catechize you in return?"

"You cannot mislead or blind me, Eleanor;

for now I am certain I am in the right. It is not curiosity, indeed, that prompts me."

"You are very indiscreet; but if it is your affection for me that makes you so very anxious to know my history, or rather Sir Charles's, perhaps—" She stopped. "It is no secret; at least, part is known to the whole world—the rest—"

"Go on," said Rosa, quietly, though the blood rushed in torrents through her veins.

"But you look quite pale—how easily you are excited!" and Eleanor looked at her wondering. "I am sure we have been talking too much for one day, and my aunt begged you to be quiet. You must let me off the remainder of my story?"

"No, no; do finish it now, pray, dear Eleanor, there is no time like the present. I

am so fond of anything that promises to be so romantic ; and if it is known to the whole world, at least, the whole English world, I suppose you mean, why should I be kept in ignorance of it ?”

“ You would hear all from different sources sooner or later,” said Eleanor, “ though, indeed, the all I have to relate is but a simple story, I am afraid, too often repeated—and now we are nothing to each other.”

“ Then you were really engaged ?” said Rosa, as if she were weighing the meaning of each syllable.

“ Yes, but it is all gone by, or I could not speak so calmly. I have shown you that you have a strange power over me ; but now, once for all, Rosa, you will ask me no more questions ?”

“ Oh, it is not all gone by—you love him

still? It is strange, oh, so strange—it was not fancy—I felt it was not. Do you not love him, Eleanor?”

“I am doing wrong in replying, and you in questioning. It is a subject that, but for the accidental falling out of the card, would never have been mentioned between us. All is ended, all was ended; when my father rejected him, and he proudly and indignantly acquiesced. And yet it is difficult sometimes to believe it is all real,” she continued, as if speaking more to herself than to her companion. “Fortune was always his enemy—even his best friends did him the worst injuries; but now he is free, and I am free. Rosa, are you content?” She turned round, wondering at her silence; to her surprise and terror Rosa had fainted.

Bitterly accusing herself of imprudence, as

she hastily called for assistance and used every means for restoring animation, she pondered over the conversation of the last few moments. Why had Rosa been so deeply interested? What if she had unintentionally touched a cord that had vibrated too strongly in her own heart!

Fortunately Rosa soon rallied, and apologizing for the anxiety she had caused her, she begged Eleanor not to be frightened, for that, of late, she had been subject to such attacks, and had felt unusually weak and nervous, adding, she hoped she would finish her interesting story another time.

Eleanor only looked at her still more anxiously. If, as she had confessed, she had not been actuated by mere curiosity, what was her concealed motive? a mere casual acquaintance could not have caused such evident

emotion. Young as she was, perhaps she had been fascinated by the charms of Sir Charles's manner; perhaps he himself, in the recklessness of his despair, had passed, in the admiration she would naturally excite, the bounds of a mere simple ball-room flirtation. She hoped the subject would never more be mentioned between them. It was fortunate that for the next few days Eleanor had an engagement at home. As soon as she was at liberty she paid another visit to the White Cottage.

She was shocked to see the change that had taken place in Rosa. Her melancholy seemed to have increased; all the ground she had gained to be completely lost. She would sit for hours, either alone, or by her mother's side, with her book before her, or her work, or drawing-materials untouched, as if all strength or desire of occupying herself had

departed. Yet she liked having Eleanor always beside her. Then they spoke as formerly upon many subjects, but the name of Seymour was never again mentioned, and Eleanor became each day only more and more confirmed in her opinion. It was strange that a sympathy should have sprung up so instantaneously between herself and Rosa. But some more strenuous measures for the improvement of her health must be taken. Did her Aunt note as she did Rosa's increased weakness. Alas! *she* knew that the only remedy that could be applied was wanting. Yet while there was life there was hope. The air of Hampshire was evidently unsuited; even before Mr Dalrymple's return, she felt it would be advisable to remove Rosa; yet trouble and ill-success seemed to follow all her undertakings, to blight all her hopes.

How had she earnestly hoped to secure her child's happiness by sanctioning her marriage with Sir Charles Seymour,—and now to what misery had it not led! The tenor of his letters was kind, even deprecatory, but did that make amends for his unnecessary, perhaps cruel absence. No, they rather seemed to increase than diminish Rosa's unhappiness. She read too clearly in his indifference to herself, his love for another.

Eleanor trembled as she looked upon the mother and daughter who apparently lived but for each other. Surrounded by luxury, wanting nothing that wealth could give, the instability of human happiness never rose to her mind so forcibly as when she was exerting her own feeble powers to give hope and comfort, which she felt she could not, dared not, even indulge. She willingly promised to leave

home, and accompany Rosa wherever she wished; for though she seemed totally indifferent to everything on her own account, yet, for her mother's sake, she consented to be removed to Bournemouth. There, in the course of a few days, she was established. If anything could have restored her to health, it would have been the soft yet invigorating sea-breeze that was wafted towards her, while her eyes rested calmly and pleasurably upon the broad expanse of the changing ocean, bounding the horizon.

One evening, after a day of close confinement, willingly borne for Rosa's sake, Eleanor had, at Mrs Cecil's request, left her in order to refresh herself by a walk on the sea shore. Rosa had been more than usually suffering, and now, as she lay apparently sleeping, the poor mother had stolen to her

bed-side, and sat hidden by the curtain, listening to the difficult breathing, watching the flushed cheek, and all the evidence of the increasing inwardly consuming fever which had baffled the care of the two attending physicians. She could not conceal from herself that Rosa's delicate constitution had given a cruel power to the stroke which had fallen so heavily upon her. Where the mind was diseased, what remedy could be applied. Was all she most loved on earth, then, to be taken from her! Her own beautiful darling child; was her's, in the midst of the best of life's gifts, was her's to be an early grave!

Must all be parted with! and must she herself be doomed to linger out a lonely existence, at the moment when happiness appeared to have crowned the search of years. How could she part from her child!

At that moment Rosa drew aside the curtain—she looked at her mother, with her deep, earnest eyes, without speaking. She placed her hand in her's.

“Mother,” she said, at length, “dearest mother—I have been thinking over many things. Do not be unhappy—I am quite happy, I am really, I am quite prepared to die—to leave you, to leave all I love.”

“I cannot part from you, my own child,” and bursting into tears, she knelt down by her, placed her hand upon her forehead, then folded her arms around her. She had seldom shown such emotion.

“I have lived to call you mother, and should I not be thankful? you do not know what I feel, all I suffer in the long wearisome night—I know with all your care you cannot keep me with you, mother!”

“ I know all, my child—but for my sake, for his sake, you must live; how can I part from you ?”

“ Eleanor told me one day a strange, terrible tale,” continued Rosa, while she fixed her eyes upon her mother’s face. “ I must tell it all before I die to you. He saw that I loved him. I cannot live through his contempt and indifference, for he was poor, and I in his sight was only rich, and necessity compelled him towards me. I see it all clearly. He loved another, and that other is Eleanor.” And then she told, how the truth had dawned, then flashed upon her, confirmed by Eleanor’s agitation, how she had controlled her own emotion that she might read the depths of Eleanor’s heart; how she had made her confide all her secret to her, unconscious of the wounds she was inflicting. He had married

her perhaps partly out of pique at Mr Neville's rejection, partly to relieve himself from pressing difficulties.

And who could see all more clearly than Mrs Cecil! Yes, all was explained that Mr Dalrymple had delicately forborne to mention. His heart had been another's, even while his vows had been offered to Rosa. His long absence was evidently, on his part, an earnest, silent endeavour to forget the past, and begin life anew. On his return might not things assume a brighter aspect! Her heart whispered, No! no! as she looked at Rosa.

"And now, mother, when I am gone, let him be happy—and Eleanor—you will promise me, for my sake. Perhaps I shall never see him again, and he will never know my love for him." For a moment she raised herself, clung to her mother, threw her arms round

her, then gently lay down, as a child taking its rest, and again fell asleep. Oh, there was agony in that quiet room, deep, silent,—yet tempered by resignation, humble christian resignation!

What is suffering sent for? what are trials we experience,—but steps leading heavenwards? Happy those who ascend in heart thither, where love in mercy points; who can feel that, in reality, nothing is lost,—neither trouble, nor happiness, nor kindness, nor generosity. No, nothing is lost, not even our very faults and weaknesses, if only we view each moment of our lives as part of a great progressive whole, which ends in eternity.

Again Eleanor and Mrs Cecil watched by Rosa's bed-side, during that long night, for the life that was waning was becoming more and more precarious. The following morning

she told her mother that she wished to confide her secret to Eleanor : she had fixed upon that evening for opening her heart to her.

But that very evening another was standing by her, but she was unconscious of his presence ; his lips were pressed upon her brow—her cheek ; he knelt by her—he bent over her—despair and anguish were in his heart ; but she neither heard nor spoke. She was not dreaming of earthly love, or injury, or pain. Angels were visiting her in that last sleep in which the soul sometimes hovers upon the confines of two worlds. Her hands were clasped in the attitude of prayer—her lips were parted in one long, last smile, as she breathed her last in her mother's arms.

Charles Seymour, for it was he, gazed upon Death.

There—where young, joyous, beautiful life

had been so lately illuminating every feature, giving such bright promises—there was still, powerless Death!

Sorrow, fear, hope, friendship, love—all silenced for ever!

Could he look on unmoved? Did Rosa's mother reproach him, now all was past? Could reproach, remorse, explanation, add to or diminish from the reality of Death?

No! It was not a moment for aught save silence and prayer. The childless mother cast but one look upon Seymour, and she knelt down at Rosa's side. To her, though the voice she loved was hushed, the well-known accents still spoke. She would not be alone in that silent room, though she motioned to those standing around to leave her.

All reverently obeyed.

Seymour and Eleanor had met once more.

Years could not have changed him in the ordinary course of life more than those months had done which had passed since he had last parted from her.

She looked at him, fearing and wondering.

She had then been all forgotten, so soon!
She had then never been anything to him!
He was married to another!

Then she hid her face from him, as she spoke—

“ Oh! if you had only made her happy, I could have forgiven you. You owed me nothing! You were free! Now you have brought misery upon many!”

For one moment he, even now, implored her to listen to him; but his very touch, as he took her hand, seemed pollution—she fled from his very presence. But he woul

not have asked for leniency or justice at Eleanor's hands.

She had nothing to forgive. It was Rosa who had been deceived. Oh! Time would avenge the dead!

CHAPTER VIII.

“What, wak'st thou Spring! sweet voices in the woods,
And reed-like echoes, that have long been mute,
Thou bringest back, to fill the solitudes.
The lark's clear pipe, the cuckoo's viewless flute,
Whose tune seems breathing mournfulness or glee,
E'en as our hearts may be!”

Mrs HEMANS.

SOME months had passed. Spring was acting, over again, the never-ending, still ever-recommeneing miracle, clothing all in gladness, brightening gloom, and realizing hope. The voice of birds was heard again in the land; flowers breathed soft fresh odours, beneath the budding trees; the air was full of life, and young beauty was everywhere. It

seemed as if sorrow and sighing should flee away for ever, and that peace and joy, and adoration, should fill every heart.

Yet one mourned in secret, asking, but not repiningly, why trials had been sent? why some secret voice had not whispered of the tenor of life to come, that temptations might be guarded against. But it was a vain foolish thought, and Eleanor rejoiced in another's happiness, and was thankful that she could so rejoice.

It was the eve of Mabel's wedding-day, and Herbert Dalrymple was standing by the side of his bride elect for the last time, as Mabel Neville.

He was pointing to her future home, as its grey walls rose just visible amidst the distant trees. He was touching upon his former life, his happy boyhood, youth, and

on that one event which had so gloomily coloured his character, teaching so early distrust, self-dependence, experience. And then he looked at Mabel, as he drew her towards him, with a fondness, which words even had hitherto seldom expressed.

There were still, though weeks had passed since Mabel had consented to unite her destiny to his, many confidences to be made, still there were many little explanations demanded! Who felt himself so much fortune's favourite as Herbert Dalrymple? while, if Mabel was on her side conscious of possessing the advantage of youth and a happy disposition, she no less valued the privilege of being able through life to trust herself to the guidance of one whom she could honour as well as love.

All looked so very bright in prospect, and

yet a tear started to her eye. "This dear room, my mother, father, sisters, my own home, my liberty. Do you hear that word, Mr Herbert Dalrymple? my liberty, that I prize so much, I am giving up all for you. I am sure you must be afraid of all this terrible responsibility."

"No! for you love me better than all the world beside," he answered, so seriously, that it was Mabel's turn now to feel deeply impressed.

"I suppose you are right," she said, blushing; "but I shall not allow that to be the question under consideration. I want *you* to tell *me* that you will be kind to me, kinder than ever; promise that you will banish all suspicion, coldness, reserve."

"I promise nothing. If a man is naturally suspicious, cold, reserved, do you think

the mere fact of his marrying is to work miracles." He smiled, but he was not speaking only in jest.

"Then, if you will not promise, suppose I say I will not marry you. But tell me you do think yourself most fortunate, highly blessed. You must confess I have taught you some excellent practical lessons.

"Oh! yes, I will promise, I will confess to anything—to-day, of course; but I shall take some time to answer your question, really. If you should ever become a little less independent in spirit, a little less proud, a little less truthful—mirthful—gay—beautiful, I will not say what may not happen."

"I understand;" said Mabel, quietly. "I am foolish—I expect impossibilities—you mean to say. I like your making excuses for yourself by bringing me into disgrace.

Once for all, I only ask you to love me always." And now she looked at him too earnestly for him to be able to jest with her, even at this moment of his unalloyed happiness.

"As I always have loved you, Mabel; from the first moment—no, not moment—day—week—in spite of all your mischievous propensities; in short, in spite of all your faults."

"I thank you! I suppose I ought to have understood the meaning of your cross words, and colder looks, and wretched silence. Certainly you were very politic."

"And you may add—discerning! I soon discovered that if you thought you could have everything your own way, you would have been lost in the mazes of your easily-won triumph."

“How we poor innocent creatures are deceived! But, in one respect, I was as discerning as you were, Mr Dalrymple. I always thought you a ‘misanthrope, *malgré lui*.’ I was certain a little flattery would bring you round, and that you would end by being the most”—

“The most devoted husband in the whole world.”

“So much the better! Do you think you will be equal to Mr Beverley, at last? You know my friend, poor Florence, is to marry Mr Beverley;” she said, with a smile, which spoke volumes.

“Yes! I know all; and also that Lord Carlsfort has taken compassion upon Lady Emily Farquaharson.”

“If you do not retract those words, ‘taken

compassion,' I will not marry you to-morrow. I think he is most fortunate in his choice."

"And so do I, since you prefer Hazel-ymph to Melverley."

"Who would not? Those dear old grey walls are worth all the carved freestone of Melverley. But no more mention of that name, it makes me unhappy; it reminds me that I have lost a friend."

"No, no! You cannot lose what you had never gained."

"Ah! you must not teach me many more such painful lessons. Do you know the first impression I retained of you was a sad, a very melancholy one. Something would whisper to me that you were right, and that I was wrong; and yet I hoped and trusted, against all your warnings,—and my own."

“And I was obliged to appear very hard-hearted, and prepare you for the consequences that I foresaw would follow.”

“Then you do not believe in friendship?”

“On the contrary, I believe friendship to be the most exalted, the noblest feeling of a mere earthly nature; but not such as exists in the heart of Lady Florence.”

“I must tell you I have hardly yet forgiven you for a great many misdemeanours, particularly for your conduct towards her; you made yourself much too interesting. Now, tell me, is your conscience quite at ease?”

“Quite, on that score,” he replied, smiling.
“I did not expect your speedy forgiveness, nevertheless. Lady Florence’s humility, I am

pleased to think, soon exhausted itself. I have not much faith in sudden conversions."

"I am so glad you make such nice little allowances for yourself," she said, looking up at him nevertheless, as if the confidence he had contrived to inspire her with could never fail.

"I wish to make every allowance where it is possible," he replied, seriously, "and I hope your tenderness may temper my stern nature, but we deceive ourselves if we think we can find perfection. I believe, if Mr Beverley had not come into the title he now possesses, he would not have ventured to ask for the hand of Lady Florence Trevelyan."

"Ah, I see you are incorrigible! Will there be any leniency shown me if I fail in making

you the 'happiest of men? It is the height of my ambition!"

He could only look upon her, and draw her still closer towards him, as he thought—oh! most happy thought—that she was his own for ever!

CHAPTER IX.

“ Our early loved—hath their after path
From our steps far parted been ?
Hath the hand of power, or the flame of wrath,
On life's barriers risen between ?
Yet still in our dreams their shadows come
O'er the parting waste of years,
Though the path is marked with many a tomb,
And the sands are wet with tears.”

ONCE more, and for the last time, the reader must be introduced within the walls of Linstead.

Five years have passed, yet the recollection of the young and gentle Rosa is still fresh in the memory of two individuals who, for the time, are the occupants of the often-described

old-fashioned library, from which Sir Philip Seymour loved to contemplate his long-descended paternal acres, now restored to their rightful heir.

Time had, indeed, worked many changes. To the young and thoughtless, it had brought sorrow,—in its train, amendment; to the old new aims and interests had arisen, where all appeared desert and unfruitful.

Rosa was avenged,—but in a manner that would have satisfied even her noble and tender heart. At the moment that Seymour had seen the look cast upon him by the bereaved and childless mother, he made an inward vow, that henceforth the only way in which he could in any degree secure peace of mind, would be by devoting himself to making amends, to the utmost of his power, for the sufferings of which he was indeed the un-

willing author. Nor did he rest till he obtained Mrs Cecil's consent to spend some portion of every year in his retirement at Linstead. To her the world had, indeed, faded quickly. She looked no more for either pleasure or profit. Where duty called her, there inclination led her; and towards Seymour, in his melancholy and deep repentance, she felt attracted by no common ties. He had been the idol of her beloved child, should she not strive to soften the edge of the keenest self-reproach? For he who had, comparatively so short a time previous, been so carelessly gay, still mourned in secret his errors and their consequences, as those only can mourn who have cast a blight over the happiness of others. We may bear our own griefs more easily than those of others!

But now showed forth the steadfast beauty

of a character tempered as Mrs Cecil's had been. Each gleam that shone upon Seymour's upward path in life, lit up her downward steps, and shed abroad over her heart a peace to which she had long been a stranger. Not a scheme of benevolence was proposed, or any sacrifice to promote the good of the needy and dependent, which did not first await her sanction, or was rewarded with her approbation. Order was re-established where disorder had reigned—happy faces greeted on all sides the present possessor of Linstead; and could old Sir Philip have now revisited the home he had loved so devotedly, he would not have regretted that circumstances, which he could not take into account, had occurred to replace his favourite nephew in the position he had so ardently wished him to occupy. Still there was a void, a deep, terrible void,

which nothing could fill ; and Mrs Cecil's kind heart grieved in secret for him who had gained the experience of age, at the expense of all the happiness and lightheartedness of youth.

The strange events in Seymour's life, the tragic ending which had changed a mother's joy and pride into desolation, were never commented upon. Yet between the mother and the son-in-law there existed an understanding, which acquaintance with each other's character had now placed upon the happiest footing.

The past, with its yearnings and its hopeful stretchings forth into the future, could never return. Might not that future itself be fraught with blessings, if only sought for aright ?

Year by year, as Mrs Cecil paid, according to promise, a lengthened visit to Linstead,

did these thoughts assume a more definite and active form. She had established her home in the White Cottage, which was endeared to her by recollections only too fondly cherished. There had she received her child's last breath, and listened to her parting words; and in the little churchyard on the borders of the New Forest, now rested all she had best loved on earth. Rosa's hallowed grave was the spot where Mrs Cecil and her favourite Eleanor often met. Theirs had been a strange meeting, and a strange link of feeling had united them ever since their first day's acquaintance. They could mourn together over Rosa's early loss—but surely, for Eleanor, mourning was not to last for ever.

To fulfil Rosa's last wishes, was a theme upon which Mrs Cecil dwelt with an earnestness peculiar to her nature.

The next visit to Linstead she was determined should afford opportunities for putting her plan into execution.

One morning she sat at a *tete-à-tete* with Sir Charles, who had just parted from his friend Hastings, now Lord Beverley, and his handsome wife, Lady Florence.

The conversation had taken an unusual turn, the subject under discussion being that of marriages, fortunate and unfortunate. Neither openly expressed an opinion; but Lord Beverley's union with Lady Florence was supposed by many to come under the latter denomination, as, having moved into the highest circle, he was gradually becoming more and more lost to sight in the crowd of admirers Lady Florence's beauty everywhere created.

"Lord Beverley is a person who excites in my heart pity more than any other feeling,"

said Mrs Cecil ; “ though I am glad that you, I see, never desert old friends.—There is one in whom I should still wish you to feel interested:” at the same time she handed Sir Charles a letter she had that morning received, and pointed to one particular passage.

He read as follows, while the colour mounted to his cheek, as he took the letter, which was in a well-known handwriting :

“ I am content and thankful, if one in whom we have both been so deeply and painfully interested makes you happy. It proves that I was not deceived in the character over which the most unfortunate circumstances exercised such a cruel power.” His eye glanced to the signature—“ Eleanor Neville”—it rested there for one moment. Then he returned the letter to Mrs Cecil.

“ If you value my approbation and blessing,

Charles, they are yours. You have deserved both," she said, looking at him kindly and steadily. "I wish you to follow your own heart's dictates."

"You have always been goodness itself to me," he replied, with evident emotion. "I cannot misunderstand your meaning: but do not speak to me of her;" he pointed to the letter.

"Yes! but you love her still. Your fate has been a hard one; and my earnest wish now is that you should make her happy."

"Happy!" he replied, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone: "she does not look to me for happiness. Long, long ago, that was all past. She does but despise me. I have only deserved her contempt."

"Each day is fitting you to become more worthy of her," she replied, calmly; "and you

must not speak of contempt in connexion with Eleanor Neville, so gentle, so kind to all."

"I know all—all. I know *you* know, for I am not afraid of confessing to you, my best of friends, how I loved her. But if you have any regard for me, let this subject never be mentioned again between us. It reminds me too much that I only wish I could forget."

"You must be reasonable, Charles, and not mar your own happiness. I wish you to see all clearly. I love Eleanor as my child; to my treasured, lost Rosa, she was as a sister. In those days little did we think what secret bond united them in such close sympathy. I want to see Eleanor happy."

His heart beat quick at the mention of the name he had so idolized; but he dismissed the bright visions Mrs Cecil's words recalled.

"No, no! do not tempt me! If I have

gained your forgiveness, it is all I dare ask, or hope for. To Eleanor Neville I am nothing."

"A noble heart can forgive—but it cannot forget, where love claimed a share in it. I believe that you are still dear to Eleanor."

"But that cold, disdainful look—that one look that lives in my memory, excluding all that was once so beautiful and so dear. It haunts me always."

"I know well, how you have suffered, Charles. I have noted all silently. If you had not suffered, I do not think you would have been worthy of Eleanor."

Seymour still continued musing over her last words, though Mrs Cecil rose and left the room. She had given him sufficient subject for thought.

Was there, indeed, a hope that the hap-

piness she had pictured might still be in store for him. Humbled as he had been, in his own eyes and in the eyes of Mrs Neville, of Eleanor, of all whom he valued, he still felt that a certain amount of self-respect was due to him. Should he dare once more to trust all to Eleanor's generosity!

To debate, to weary himself with conjecture, to buoy himself up with the most delightful hopes, and then to fancy them all dashed to the ground, was the harassing occupation of the next twenty-four hours.

In the course of the following day he found himself on the way to the Glen.

Mrs Cecil had assured him, that he would be kindly received by Mr and Mrs Neville. This assurance went far to tranquillize his excited spirit, and for the first time in his life he secretly rejoiced in the consciousness

that good was now spoken of him far and wide in a world where a fair name, if hardly earned, is not earned undeservedly.

When the well-known view gradually opened before him, as he neared the Glen, his emotion became intensely painful. He was risking so much upon the chance of one throw!

In a few moments, part of the weight of anxiety he was suffering was diminished. He was shown into the room where Mr and Mrs Neville were together. Eleanor was not there. It was a relief to him to know that she was absent from home, and would not return till the following day. Nor had Mrs Cecil encouraged hopes, which his reception by the Nevilles failed to realize.

It seemed as if all had by one consent

been forgotten that could in any way have marred the pleasure of this meeting, as Mr Neville spoke words of friendly welcome, and Mrs Neville, with the happy smile of old, told him, as she looked at him almost affectionately, how glad she was to see him once more amongst them. He was not (he did them the justice to feel) received by them as merely the wealthy possessor of Linstead, instead of the outlawed spendthrift, but as one in whom prosperity had accomplished what adversity had failed to produce; or rather as one in whom the trials of adversity had brought forth fruit in the bright, and sometimes too scorching, sun of prosperity.

The evening passed away pleasantly, and without any appearance of reserve. Mrs Cecil had evidently paved the way for him,

and his fears already assumed a less terrible form. The following morning he was awaiting Eleanor's arrival, in the well-known room of which, since Mabel's marriage, she had become the sole possessor.

He hardly dared to think of that one last interview in this room, since which all had become so changed. He scarcely even dared to look around him and examine the many evidences that assured him this could be none other than Eleanor's own favourite abode, for his eye glanced here upon a book he had given her, there upon a set of ivory ornaments he had carved for her, upon a screen they had painted together. Many little relics there were of those bright days. If he were quite forgotten, or remembered only with horror and indignation, she would for ever have discarded all these

little mementoes ! But, perhaps, he was only perfectly indifferent to her ! At length the door opened. She had been prepared by her mother for Seymour's unexpected arrival, still it was almost a most painful reality that he was there once more before her, in the very place he had appropriated to himself in this room so many years ago.

Her first impulse, as she turned the handle of the door, and half entered the room, was to retire, for memories rushed thick upon her of that last scene, of that last terrible meeting, and hasty parting.

However, she was no longer in her own power. He instantly rose and went towards her—their hands met.

It was the time for the expression of Seymour's thoughts, for his highly-wrought feelings alone. No common words of welcome,

of surprise, or, prompted by self-command, could pass between them.

“Eleanor,” he said, quickly, “I am not, wrong—you do not think me wrong—for having sought to see you once more. Oh, this room has spoken to me of so much, of so much that is dear—I cannot say how dear—to me.”

She looked at him without speaking, as her colour went and came, and she felt as if her very breath were leaving her. It was so like a dream, to know that he was there once more opposite—beside her—in the same room with herself.

“Only let me hear your voice,” he said, in a tone in which pity and fear and all his former love were strangely mingled. “Poor Eleanor; it is all too sudden, I have startled you, I fear.”

Still she looked at him, while her eyes filled with tears. To her he was so altered, so care-worn; yet still his voice reminded her of all she had long wished to forget. Still he was the same Charles of former days, only so changed.

“You should not have come here, Charles. Why are you come? I cannot believe it is real. Surely I am, or should be, forgotten.”

“No, no! not forgotten;—never, never;—only remembered too well and fondly—remembered, perhaps, to my sin; I trust not, I will hope, not to my sorrow.”

“All is, has long been, ended between us; and you have no cause to reproach yourself, at least not as regards me,”—she hesitated. “I have always considered you free—even long before your marriage.”

She spoke low, as if it pained her to pronounce the words.

“No, no; I was never free—in heart, never. For the treacherous, unworthy part I played, how have I suffered; little did I imagine what terrible fate was in store for me!”

“You would, I am sure, have ended by making *her* happy; but it was no doubt all ordered for the best, and now you are everything to her mother—to my aunt, Mrs Cecil.”

“That was kindly spoken, and kindly meant,—yet I would rather hear reproaches from you, Eleanor, only reproach me as I deserve.”

“I have no reproaches for you, they could not bring back the angel we have lost; besides you have suffered enough.” She looked

at him pityingly. "And yet only five short years have passed."

She turned away to hide an emotion she rarely showed. She fancied she had schooled herself into resignation; that she had overcome all weakness. She persuaded herself, that a character such as Seymour's could but deserve pity, if not blame.

"Oh, Eleanor, have you nothing for me but words so calmly spoken. Why have I broken in upon the silence of years, trusting all, hoping all, not listening to the fears, the warnings of my own heart! I am come once more into your presence, once more, in this dear room, I am by your side."

"You would have done better, more prudently, to have heeded the warnings you speak of. Indeed, I do not mean to hurt your feelings, or to be unkind."

“ I will not hear you speak so coldly, I cannot believe you can be unforgiving,” he said, passionately. “ Deep as the offence was, you were not wont to be unforgiving, Eleanor.”

“ But experience teaches sad lessons ; though believe me when I say, I do not feel that have anything to forgive. Every thing, every one speaks in your praise, your own approbation is now your just reward ; you must be thankful, and content.”

“ Oh, Eleanor, I do not ask your forgiveness, or even that you should ever forget all that must have lowered me in your eyes. But how deeply I was tried, how contrary fate was to me, you cannot know. You once loved me, I do not ask you to take me back once more to that loving heart ; but let me hope, only hope.”

“Do not speak of hope,” she answered, sadly. “Years, trials, even death have come between us and what we once were, and now it is best for you and for me, that we should be as we are—as we have long been. I had hoped to have been spared such a scene as this.”

“But had fortune smiled upon me, then as now, we should never have been separated, Eleanor.”

“Once, as you know, I would have followed you through poverty. Your home should have been mine; your trials and your joys equally mine. Your will, not mine, decided it otherwise. I am still poor, though you are rich.”

This was proudly spoken, something of the woman’s dignity tempering the tenderness and meekness which characterised Eleanor.

“These are cruel words; and yet I must bear them for your sake. I will bear all, only

be still the same Eleanor who has been ever dear to me."

"No, do not tempt me. All is still too fresh in my memory; yet I would not cast one more shadow upon your path. I have reasoned, striven with myself. I have forced myself to see that all is for the best. My affections are more than ever centred in my home, where I have found love that never changes, but only increases day by day."

"Oh! if it has been, as you confess, a struggle, there is hope for me. '*On pardonne tant, qui l'on aime,*'" he said, his every feature sparkling with a new emotion. "You have uttered words which I had never thought to hear from your lips, Eleanor; but you would be more than woman if you did not resent an injury such as that you have received, but of which I will not say I was in heart guilty."

Remember it was the touching gentleness of your nature, not proud magnanimity, so little loveable, which first won my affection." He spoke imploringly, it is true, but in the tone of one more injured than injuring.

She raised her eyes, they met his; in another moment he was beside her, kneeling close to her, his arms were around her, once more he pressed her to his heart. It was a moment outweighing in happiness all the misery that had gone before.

"I have done wrong. I am foolishly weak. So soon tempted, so easily overcome; against all my resolutions, fighting, as I have done, a hard fight for many years."—Thus Eleanor spoke, but she did not turn away from him. How could she refuse what she had never ceased to wish for?

"Would that we had never parted," he

whispered. "Now you must be generous, and believe that not an hour has passed since our last parting in which I did not endeavour to atone for the irrecoverable past. But yet nothing shall be forgotten, and her mother, Rosa's mother, will bless me through you."

"Only with her consent can I relent, Charles. Can you promise it me?"

"Then you are mine for ever." And he told her how Mrs Cecil had generously endeavoured to overcome his scruples, and urged him to the perilous step he had taken; perilous, because involving, he felt, his whole future happiness.

* * * * *

It was summer. Long shadows were telling the hour of the departing day; resting upon the yew-trees in the little church-yard, they were thrown across Rosa's quiet grave. A

cross, at the base of which was carved a kneeling female figure, clinging to it, and looking upward, marked the spot. A wild sweet honey-suckle and clusters of china and blush roses grew near. Not a weed was to be seen thriving in careless luxuriance. It had been Eleanor's pleasure to watch over this sacred spot. Often she and Rosa's mother visited it together, and here they could speak of one whom both mourned,—the early wed, and the early dead.

It was to this spot that Eleanor now led the way, leaning on the arm of him from whom she had promised never more to part. In securing her own happiness she felt that she was also fulfilling Rosa's last wishes.

THE END.

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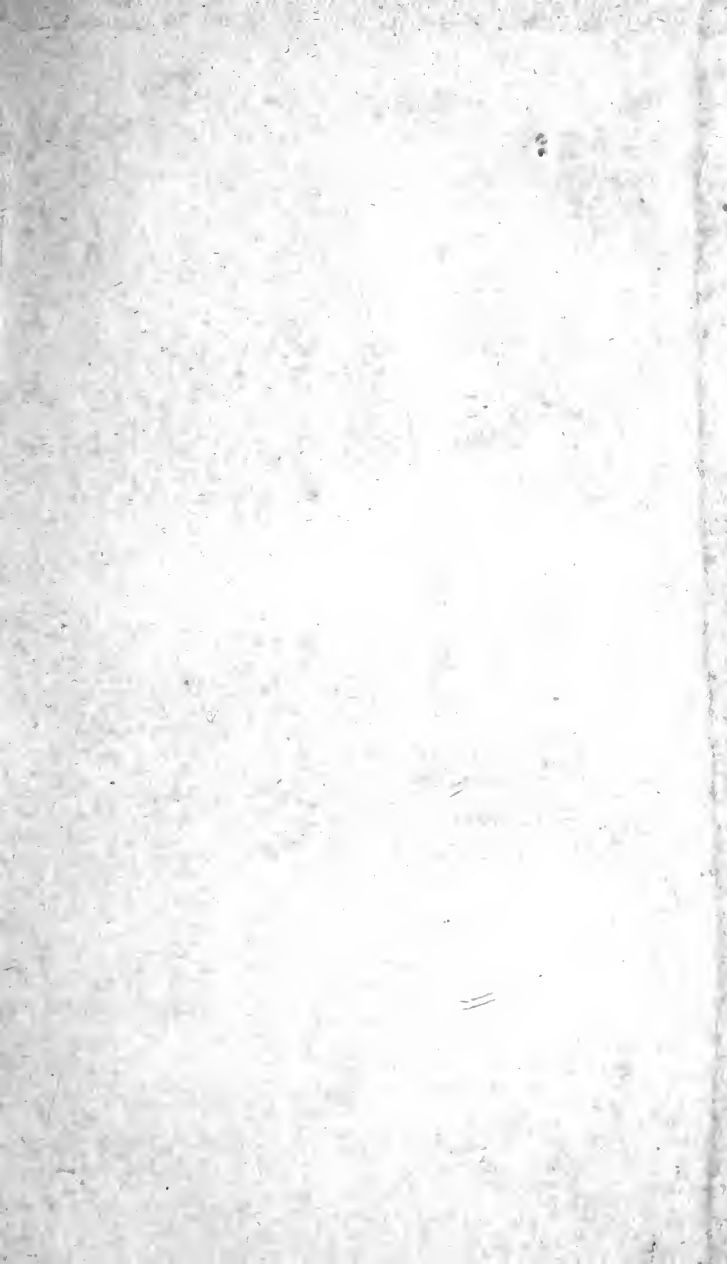
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